

CAPTAIN FAIR AND SQUARE



WILLIAM HEYLIGER



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Captain Fair and Square

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CAPTAIN FAIR-AND-SQUARE

By WILLIAM HEYLIGER

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THE SILVER RUN
RITCHIE OF THE NEWS
THE GALLANT CROSBY
JOHNNY BREE
THE BUILDER OF THE DAM
THE MACKLIN BROTHERS
THE MAKING OF PETER CRAY
THE FIGHTING CAPTAIN
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CAPTAIN FAIR AND SQUARE
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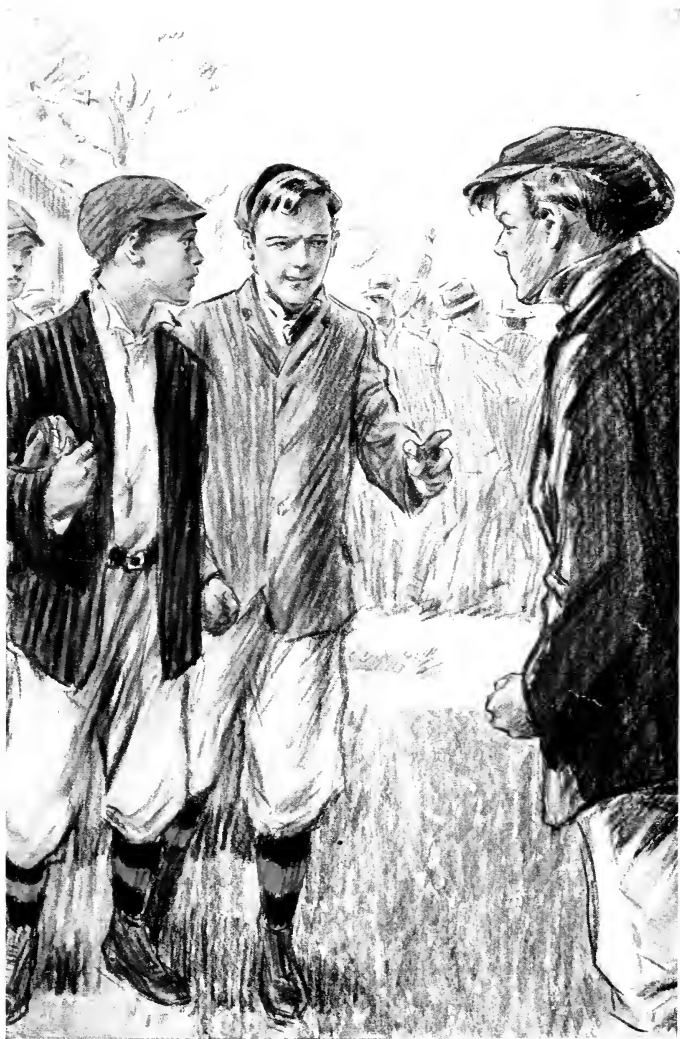
BARTLEY, FRESHMAN PITCHER
STRIKE THREE!
THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE
AGAINST ODDS
OFF SIDE

Boy Scouts Series

DON STRONG OF THE WOLF PATROL
DON STRONG, PATROL LEADER
DON STRONG, AMERICAN

Lansing Series

BATTER UP STRAIGHT AHEAD
FAIR PLAY



“‘I wouldn’t, Carrots, if I were you,’ he said.”

CAPTAIN FAIR-AND-SQUARE

BY
WILLIAM HEYLIGER

AUTHOR OF "OFF SIDE," "AGAINST ODDS," "DON STRONG OF THE WOLF PATROL," ETC.



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NOV 1916

1916

THE
SPRAGUE PUBLISHING COMPANY

D157376

Printed in the United States of America

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CAPTAIN FAIR-AND-SQUARE

CHAPTER I

A NEW IDEA

FOUR boys boarded the stage at the Fairview post office—Carlson, captain of the eleven; Neale, captain of the nine; Wally Hamilton, who played football indifferently well, and Buddy Jones. Carlson, Neale and Hamilton climbed aboard with noisy shouts to a red-haired boy standing in the road. He took a cigarette from his mouth and waved it at them.

“Don’t take in any wooden money,” he advised.

Carlson laughed. “Say, this will be the biggest lark ever. So long, Carrots.”

“So long,” answered the boy. “I’ll be watching for you.”

The stage rolled away on its five-mile trip to Iron-town.

Buddy Jones edged close to the others. Carlson nudged Neale.

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"Let's see that letter again."

The baseball captain took a well-thumbed paper from his pocket. The boys put their heads together. Buddy peered over Hamilton's shoulder. Neale read aloud:

"PRESIDENT,

"Fairview High School Athletic Ass'n.

"DEAR SIR:

"A meeting will be held at the Irontown High School, next Saturday, for the purpose of forming the high schools of the county into an athletic league. For some time past, as you know, there has been much complaint about the manner in which our sports are conducted. We ought to try to remedy this by adopting rules that will lead to clean athletics. Will you please send representatives to the meeting?"

"CHARLES A. DRAKE,

"Pres. Irontown High School A. A."

Carlson chuckled. "Hot stuff, isn't it?" He grinned and put the letter in his pocket. "Well," he said, "we're on our way. We'll see what we shall see."

Wally Hamilton looked back and winked at Buddy. But Buddy's face was grave.

"Hello!" cried Wally. "Here's a fellow who takes it seriously."

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"Ah, shucks," said Carlson. "This chap Drake has a bug. It's all right for high schools like Iron-town, where they have a couple of hundred students, to play the high and holy, but how about the little schools like ours? We must have players, mustn't we?"

"I—I suppose we must," said Buddy.

"What gets me," Neale said slowly, "is why Poole paid any attention to the letter. Why did he send us?"

"Poole's another bug," said Carlson. "Don't you get crazy, Buddy."

"I was only thinking," Buddy answered.

In fact, he kept thinking all during the ride to Irontown. Was Carlson right? Was it wrong for the small school that was shy of players to use boys who were not students? There was Carrots O'Toole, for instance. Carrots was not a student. Yet Carrots, for two years now, had played on the eleven and on the nine.

Buddy would like to have asked questions about Carrots's standing, but he did not dare. For one thing, he was not a delegate to this meeting. He would not be a high school pupil until September. However, judging from his records on a grammar school team, he was a brainy

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little quarterback and a sturdy young catcher. Wally Hamilton, his chum, had invited him to make the trip. Nor had Carlson nor Neale objected.

"Sure," Carlson had said. "Bring the kid along. It will make him feel important. He'll work his head off for me when he comes out for quarterback."

"And by the looks of things," Neale had added, "I'm going to need a catcher next spring. Bring him by all means."

"Don't try to give him taffy," Wally had warned. "He's a wise little eel."

Carlson had grinned. "We'll let him alone and just let him think," he had said.

But he would have been surprised, just at present, had he known that Buddy was thinking about Carrots O'Toole.

The stage—it was a wheezy old sort of stage that creaked and groaned—left the dirt roads of the country and ran into the cobbled streets of Irontown. The four boys were bounced and jounced and tossed against one another. Finally Carlson cried, "Here we are," and they tumbled out and stretched their legs. Neale glanced at a clock in a store window.

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"Five of two," he said. "We'll just about make it. The meeting is at two o'clock."

Buddy wanted to take his time. It was his first trip to the county seat and there was much to be seen. But the others hurried him along until presently they came to a wide, two-storied granite building fronted by a wide, cool lawn.

"That's the Irontown High," said Carlson. "What do you think of it, Buddy?"

"It—it's great," said Buddy.

"Not like our little old wooden building, eh? No wonder these fellows can talk big about this and that in athletics."

Buddy nodded thoughtfully. This was putting the matter in a new light.

The meeting was to be held in the assembly room on the second floor. At the door a nervous boy took their names and a record of their schools.

"Fine turnout," he said. "Drake is delighted. We all are."

Carlson's eyes swept the room. "Quite a crowd," he admitted grudgingly. He was rather surprised to see so many there.

The four boys from Fairview stood in a corner. Knots of men and boys talked and argued. Buddy heard one man say that you could not depend upon

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the small schools. Then Wally Hamilton nudged him in the ribs.

"There's Drake," he whispered. "There—walking toward the stage."

Buddy saw a slim, wiry boy who looked every inch the athlete. His stride was swinging, his head was held high.

"He doesn't look like a bug," Buddy said doubtfully.

"Chowder!" cried Wally. "You can't tell a bug by just looking at him. The meeting's going to start. Come on; let's get seats."

Everybody crowded forward. Drake stepped out on the stage. A cheer started. Drake smiled and raised his hand. The cheering stopped. After that came the selection of a secretary. The nervous boy who had taken names at the door was nominated and elected. He stood up and called the roll in a small, scared voice.

Carlson, Wally and Neale answered for Fairview High. Drake stepped forward.

"I need not tell you," he said, "that I am delighted to see so many here. I have always insisted that every schoolboy is interested in honest sport, and now I know that I am right. You would not be here today unless you were interested.

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"For years we've been running along on a slipshod method. Fellows who were not students have been rung in, and there was one case where a boy from another town was brought over to play with a high school team. I know all about that case. Our football team went out for a game in one town, and a big blond fullback just about tore us up. Two weeks later we had a game with a different high school and that same blond was once more against us."

"Why didn't you quit?" cried a voice.

Drake laughed and shook his head. "That's not our style. We went there to play and we played. But we haven't booked a game with either of those high schools since."

There was a murmur around the floor. Carlson glanced questioningly at Neale and made a wry face.

"I told you he was a bug," he muttered.

"We want to get away from all that," Drake went on. "We want to start all over again and call the past forgotten. We want to organize a high school league. We want each school to promise two things: first to play only students, second to play only those students who average above a certain percentage in their studies. And Irontown High is going to be the

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first to forgive and forget—we're going to put the two schools that played the blond fullback on our schedule again."

"Now he's talking sense," said Carlson.

"I know you're tired listening to me," Drake went on, "so I'm going to ask our principal, Mr. Swayze, to tell you more about the plan. Gentlemen, Mr. Swayze."

Out from the side of the stage walked an elderly man. His hair and his beard were white, his eyes winked and blinked behind heavy glasses. But his skin was fair and pink and spoke of active days spent out in the open.

"I suppose," Mr. Swayze began slowly, "that it seems strange to see a high-school principal speaking at a meeting called to regulate athletics. I have always been interested in clean sport. More and more I have come to believe that in training a boy in his play you are training the future man. If he plays a clean game of football or baseball and scorns to take a mean advantage, he'll play a clean game in the big world of manhood. As a high-school principal it is my constant aim to turn out clean young men. So I am here today to do my little for the cause of clean athletics.

"Mistakes have been made. We all make them.

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We've made them here at Irontown. Now we want to get together and see that we don't make them again. As Mr. Drake said, the past is to be forgotten. We're all going to start anew with clean slates—and we're going to keep them clean.

"What fun is there in winning if players have to foul? What fun is there in winning if the umpire or the referee doesn't give the visiting team a fair chance? What fun is there in winning if we use a boy who should not play? We take no glory in such victories. Deep in our hearts is the knowledge that our victory is under a cloud. Our triumph is tasteless. Isn't there more fun in knowing that you put up a dandy fight than in knowing that you cheated and won?

"What good is a sneaky victory? If you play a ringer—I believe that is the word——"

"That's it," called a voice from the seats.

Mr. Swayze smiled. "Thank you. Well, if you play a ringer, do you report the matter to the captain of the other school before the game? Oh, no. You keep it hidden. You sneak that player in. That's the word—sneak. And if you win it's a sneaky victory. How much glory is there in that?

"I plead with you today for honesty in athletics.

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It isn't a slight matter; it's important. If you're clean, honest boys, you'll be clean, honest men. Play fair, play square, play honest. Let's get together, the small schools and the large schools. Let's pledge our words that no unfair actions shall darken our records. Let's be clean."

Mr. Swayze bowed and retired. A storm of cheers swept the assembly hall. Neale blinked and looked at Carlson.

"What do you know about that?" he asked.

Carlson laughed.

After that the meeting droned along. It was decided that the delegates should talk the matter over with their different schools. But Buddy, sitting on the edge of his chair, heard none of the debate. His ears still rang with the words, "play fair, play square, play honest." From Drake, perhaps, the sentiment might not have sounded so impressive. But coming from the lips of the gray-haired, venerable principal of the Irontown High School, they had thrilled him down to his soul. Was that how they did things in Irontown? Was that why Drake was such a clean-looking chap?

The meeting was over at last. Buddy followed Carlson and Neale and Wally Hamilton out to the street. Carlson and Neale spoke together in low

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tones. Wally Hamilton looked thoughtful. Buddy plodded along and said nothing.

When they reached Main Street the stage was waiting. Quite a few people were inside, and the four boys could not find seats together. Carlson, Neale and Wally secured places up front, but Buddy was forced to stay in the back. He did not feel a bit lonesome. The meeting had given him much to think about. What fun was there in a dirty victory?

"I guess this finishes Carrots O'Toole," he told himself.

Gradually, as the stage rumbled on its way, the passengers alighted. Presently there was a vacant space next to Neale. The baseball captain beckoned and Buddy went forward and took the place.

"Art Stone has been pitching to you, hasn't he?" Neale asked.

Buddy nodded.

"How is he?"

"He has a peach of a drop," Buddy answered, "but Carrots has been trying to get him to pitch with a different motion, and——"

"You mean that Carrots is wrong?" Neale asked.

"You bet he is. I know Art's pitching. I worked with him on the grammar school team for two

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years. When he uses his own motion his drop is fine——”

“You didn’t tell him to stick to his own motion, did you?”

“Yes.”

Neale whistled. “Come out of it,” he said reprovingly. “You’re only a kid alongside Carrots. Why, Carrots knows this pitching game from A to Z. Let Art alone.”

“But——”

“Come now.” Neale gave him a slap on the back that was quite friendly but at the same time quite commanding. Buddy said no more.

When the stage came to a stop in front of the Fairview Post Office, Carrots was standing at the curb. He threw away the stub of a cigarette.

“What happened?” he asked eagerly.

“Can’t use any fellow who isn’t a student,” Carlson told him sorrowfully.

“And every student who plays must have over seventy-five per cent in his studies,” Neale added.

For a moment Carrots stared at the two captains. Then he broke into a laugh.

“The poor boob!” he said. “Does Drake expect to get away with that?”

“He does,” Carlson grinned. “The poor boob!”

CHAPTER II

BROKEN FAITH

BUDDY walked home feeling somehow as though he had been cheated. He knew that both Carlson and Neale valued Carrots O'Toole as a player. His reason told him that the captains would not take kindly to a change. But he had not expected them to show such open contempt. After the fine way Mr. Swayze had spoken, it—it—— Well, it didn't seem fair.

Wally Hamilton, who walked home with him, shrugged indifferent shoulders.

"Let the captains worry," he said. "It's up to them who plays."

"But suppose Poole——"

Wally sniffed. "Poole can't do anything. Of course, he's president of the athletic association, but nobody takes the A. A. seriously. Chowder! Picture Poole saying who could or couldn't play."

Buddy couldn't picture anything of the kind. The

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A. A. collected weekly dues from each student and used the money to purchase supplies for the teams. There, however, its activities ended. It had never dictated a policy. Sometimes as few as six boys attended the monthly meetings. Its sole province seemed to be the collecting of nickels and dimes.

"Drake has one idea and Carlson has another," Wally added.

"What do you think?" Buddy asked.

Wally shrugged his shoulders. "What's the use of thinking? I don't care. Here's my corner. Coming to the field tomorrow?"

Buddy nodded and walked on. Presently he came to a small green house with a white picket fence in front. He pushed open the gate and walked around to the kitchen door.

"Need anything from the garden, Mother?" he asked.

Mrs. Jones came to the doorway. "You might bring me some tomatoes and lettuce. Did you enjoy your trip?"

"Oh, the trip was all right." Buddy went out to the garden patch. While he was picking tomatoes the front gate clicked. Buddy straightened up.

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"Hello, Bob!"

"Hello, Bud!" Bob, grimy from his work at the iron foundry, paused outside the kitchen door, "Did you go to the meeting?"

"Yes."

"How was it?"

"I'll tell you afterwards," Buddy answered.

When the supper dishes had been cleared away he related what had happened at Irontown.

"And Carlson called Drake a boob, did he?" Bob asked.

Buddy nodded. "Maybe Carlson was only talking—you know the way fellows have."

"Maybe," said Bob, and smiled.

A whistle sounded from the road, a whistle that rose and fell in several shrill blasts.

"That's Poole," said Buddy. "I guess he wants to know something about the meeting."

Outside he found the president of the A. A. leaning over the gate. Poole was small and dark, with a round thin face, and deep inquiring eyes. Sometimes he would fall into fits of silence. Carlson had named him "Dreamer" Poole.

"How was the meeting?" he asked nervously.

"Fine," Buddy answered promptly. "You—you ought to have been there."

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Poole brushed that aside. "Did you hear everything and see everything?"

"You bet I did."

"Did—did it look as though everybody was having a quiet laugh at Drake and Mr. Swayze? You know what I mean, Buddy—as though it was all a joke."

"I guess not," Buddy cried indignantly. "Mr. Swayze's speech was fine and they gave him a dandy cheer."

Poole sighed. "Carlson seemed to think—You're sure it wasn't fooling?"

"Carlson knows it wasn't fooling," Buddy said bluntly. And then he felt a stab of fright. What right had he to say what was in Carlson's mind? "Maybe Carlson does think so," he added weakly.

Poole gave him a sharp glance. "I'm sorry I didn't go," he said.

Buddy, without knowing exactly why, was sorry, too.

All next morning he weeded in the vegetable garden. After dinner he cleaned and whitewashed the chicken coop. Then, with his big mitt under one arm, he trudged off to the village field. Arthur Stone jumped up from the grass.

"Gosh! I've been waiting for you an hour." The

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pitcher moved off the proper distance and began to throw the ball. Five minutes later Buddy pulled his cap down firmly.

"All right, Art," he called. "Shoot 'em."

The pitcher wound up and let fly. Buddy shook his head.

"Not right?" Arthur asked.

"Go back to your own motion," Buddy advised.

Stone pitched again. This time the ball dropped with a sharp break. Buddy tossed the ball into the air.

"Yah! That's it."

The pitcher shook his head hopelessly. "Carrots O'Toole says my motion is all wrong. He's a pitcher; he ought to know. Yet——"

"Yet when you pitch his way you don't get it, do you?"

"No."

"All right." Buddy crouched. "Stick it in here your own way." And then as the ball came in: "Good afternoon! There's that little drop again."

Wally Hamilton came over while they were working. He dropped down on the grass.

"Trying the drop?" he asked lazily.

Buddy nodded.

"Whose motion?"

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"His own."

Wally looked up quickly. "You know what Neale said."

Arthur wanted to know what about Neale. Buddy laughed and turned the question aside. But his thoughts had been brought back to the baseball captain. Neale had told him he was a kid and not to interfere. And here he was advising the pitcher to pay no attention to the mighty Carrots O'Toole.

"Neale'll say the same when he sees that drop," the boy muttered between his lips.

"Here comes Neale now," said Wally; "and Carrots is with him."

Arthur became ill at ease. He threw two balls that went wild. Neale and Carrots stopped a few feet away.

"Rotten control, kid," Carrots said. "Come down to earth. Pitch your drop."

The pitcher looked at Buddy appealingly. Buddy held up the glove.

"You know how," he said meaningly.

Arthur pitched. The drop broke beautifully.

"Hey!" Carrots called. "Didn't I tell you not to pitch it that way?"

"He can't make it break the other way," said Buddy.

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Carrots stepped back and stared. "Gee! Since when have you become a coach?"

"I guess I know a curve," Buddy retorted.

Neale scowled. In an instant the scowl was gone. He came to Buddy with a smile.

"You let Carrots run this," he said. "Carrots knows the pitching game."

"I guess I do," Carrots admitted.

"But Art can't get the break," Buddy protested. "Just stand behind me and watch."

Instead, Neale shook his head. "How about that, Carrots?" he asked. "He'll get it after a while, won't he?"

"Sure," said Carrots. He took a box from his pocket, selected a cigarette, lighted it and blew a spray of smoke skyward. "I guess I know what's what," he boasted.

Five minutes later, after Neale and O'Toole had gone to another part of the field, Arthur Stone asked helplessly:

"What am I to pitch, Buddy?"

"I don't know," Buddy answered shortly; "I'm going home." It had suddenly dawned on him that as a possible school catcher he was entitled to the baseball captain's support. Yet Neale had decided against him and would not even give him a hearing.

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"What's the use of stewing?" Wally asked as they walked away together.

"But he can't get a curve——"

"What do you care? If Neale wants him to pitch that way it's no hair off your head. Forget it."

"Gosh!" said Buddy. "I couldn't be like you."

Wally laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

That night Buddy wanted to tell Bob about what Neale had said; but directly after supper Bob got out his algebra and sat down at the dining-room table. Buddy went out to the front porch. For several months now—in fact, since the time the job of assistant foreman had been given to another—Bob had been struggling with algebra. Buddy could not understand what it all meant.

Arthur Stone came along the street. He turned in at the gate and came up on the porch.

"Neale saw me again," he said at last.

Buddy became interested. "When?"

"A little while ago. He told me to do as Carrots said. He thinks you're only a kid."

Buddy wanted to say that kid or no kid he was able to judge a curve. However, it had dawned on him that, as baseball captain, Neale was entitled to dictate.

"Neale's boss," he said.

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"But I can't get the drop Carrots's way," the pitcher cried helplessly.

Buddy said nothing. Arthur stared at his shoe-tops. Presently, with his head still bent, he said:

"I guess Neale thinks I'll be a second-string pitcher, anyway."

"Second string?" Buddy looked up quickly. "You're the best pitcher the nine has."

"Not if Carrots plays," Arthur said slowly.

When Buddy came back to the dining-room Bob was still working. The boy went up to his room and sat on the side of his bed. Play Carrots! How could they after listening to Drake and to Mr. Swayze?

"I guess Art's just imagining things," he told himself. Somehow, that seemed to comfort him.

Next afternoon he again went to the field. For a while Arthur Stone used Carrots's side motion and then he changed to his own overhand drop. Buddy made no comment nor did the pitcher ask any questions.

Buddy saw Poole for a few minutes. The president of the A. A. hesitated as though there was something he wanted to say. Finally:

"Have you heard any talk about the meeting?" he asked.

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Buddy shook his head. "Have you?"

"Nobody seems to care one way or another. If you talk to a fellow he says, 'Oh, what's the difference? It's only a game.'" Poole bit his lips. "I wonder do they feel that way at the other small high schools?"

Buddy didn't know. He went home with the growing conviction that a great problem had come to the Fairview High School.

Next day, while he was setting out new lettuce plants, Wally Hamilton strolled along. Wally planted his legs apart and stuck his hands in his pockets.

"Chowder!" he said, "what do you think, Carrots O'Toole has a job."

"Has he?" Buddy did not look up. "What doing?"

"Peddling vegetables from a huckster's wagon. He started in today. I told Poole, and Poole wanted to know if Carrots would work every day. Why did he ask me that?"

Buddy paused with a plant in his hands. "I don't know," he said thoughtfully. "Will he work every day?"

"Chowder!" cried Wally, "you're as bad as Poole. How do I know?"

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Rain fell that afternoon and Buddy did not go to the village field. Next day, however, the sky was fair. He left home whistling cheerily, but as he approached the field his spirits fell. Carrots O'Toole was there surrounded by a laughing crowd of village boys.

It seemed that Carrots's advent into business had created something of a sensation. Ordinarily, Carrots was inclined to be pugnacious, quick to take offense and quick to come to blows. Today he seemed on the defensive, as though in taking a job he had committed some great crime against his ethics.

"He wanted me to work every day," Carrots was saying as Buddy passed. "Nothing doing, I told him—three days a week or nothing."

"How much are onions a quart?" a voice asked. Carrots smiled weakly.

"I bet even three days comes hard," another voice snickered.

This was going too far. Carrots bristled. "Hey, now; don't get fresh."

"I didn't mean anything," the voice said hastily. The boy drew back into the crowd.

This show of fear, slight though it was, restored Carrots's mastery. He selected a cigarette and

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started to swagger away. Once he paused and looked back. "You fellows behave yourselves," he called, "and some day I'll take you for a ride on the wagon."

Buddy walked over to where Arthur Stone waited. Their eyes met. Arthur winked. Then, without a word, he began to pitch.

Half an hour later Carrots came back to the field with Neale. The baseball captain saw Arthur working and promptly came toward him.

"Well," he asked with a look at Buddy, "how's the drop today?"

"I'll get it after a while," said the pitcher. He threw several times with the side-arm motion, and then delivered the ball with his own overhand swing.

"Hey!" cried Carrots warningly.

Arthur looked around. "What's the matter?"

"That's not the way I showed you."

"I know it isn't. But if I can pitch a drop two ways, overhand and sidearm, I'll be that much better off, won't I?"

Carrots stared at him suspiciously. Arthur, apparently unconcerned, began pitching again.

Carrots and Neale withdrew a step and whispered. Presently they returned.

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"You can pitch the overhand drop, can't you?" Neale asked in a voice that was intended to be friendly and coaxing.

The pitcher nodded.

"Well, give your time to the sidearm. You must learn that. Keep at it."

"But I must work the overhand sometimes or I'll lose it," Arthur said innocently. "Isn't that right, Carrots?"

But Carrots, with a grunt, whipped around and walked away. Neale, looking angry now, followed him. Arthur faced his catcher. One eye winked significantly; and at that Buddy gave a sudden, happy grin. He was sure that now their practice would get along a whole lot better.

"Gosh!" he muttered as he waited for the ball. "Art's there with the diplomacy, all right."

For a week or more after that the pitching practice went on, but not once did Carrots or Neale come near them. And then, as they were about to start one afternoon, Carlson, the football captain, appeared on the field.

"Cut out that baseball stuff," he cried. "Say, I've got a dandy plan. We'll have a swell football team this year."

Buddy took off his glove. Baseball was all right,

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but they couldn't play baseball until next spring. Football weather was almost upon them.

"You know how the big college teams do things, don't you?" Carlson asked.

Buddy and Arthur shook their heads.

"They get together before college opens. That's why they have good teams so early in the season. Now, why can't we do that?"

Stone blinked his eyes. "Why can't we do what?"

"Practice, you boob," Carlson said witheringly. "School opens in about ten days. Every other year we have begun to practice a day or so after school began. Why can't we—— What day is this? Friday. Why can't we begin to practice Monday? That will give us a week's start, and it ought to help a lot."

"Why can't we start now?" Buddy demanded. He was all on fire with itch for the game. Oh, he'd surely have to get his football clothes out of the attic tonight.

"Can't start so soon," said Carlson with a shake of his head. "I have to notify the fellows who will probably make the team—Wally Hamilton, you, Neale, Stone—— You're going to play, Art, aren't you?"

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"End," said the pitcher. "That's the only place I'm any good."

Carlson nodded to Buddy. "I'm going to try you at quarter. Poole was substitute quarterback last year, but I guess you'll do better than he. If you weren't so light——"

"My weight won't make much difference," Buddy said confidently.

"I'm thinking of the weight of the other fellows," the captain answered. "You've been playing against grammar schools and now at one jump you go against big high school fellows. That's the trouble."

But Buddy only smiled. For the moment he was quite egotistical. Weight? Shucks! He had played against some big grammar school boys and they had never daunted him.

Carlson saw the smile. He tossed his cap aside.

"Get over there," he said. "You have the ball. I'm between you and the goal. Now get past me."

It was a challenge, and Buddy accepted joyously. He ran off a little ways and turned.

"Ready?" he called.

"Ready," Carlson answered.

Buddy ran forward. His right arm was out. He'd show just how much all this talk of weight

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amounted to. He'd use his straight-arm, and he'd dodge and——

And then his right arm was bent in and a great bulk seemed to come down on him. For a moment he could not breathe. He was dazed. Then the mists began to clear from his mind. He found himself lying on the ground and blinking uncertainly.

"You shouldn't have tackled him so hard," he heard Stone say.

And Carlson's reply: "Well, he had to be shown, didn't he?"

Buddy sat up. Carlson helped him to his feet. His confidence and his egotism were gone. He limped away, and turned and limped back.

"You see what weight means, don't you?" Carlson asked.

Buddy nodded.

"Hurt you?"

"No—not now."

Carlson frowned and looked at him suspiciously.

By the time Buddy was halfway home his limp was gone. The shock of the tackle had jarred him for a moment. Now his football blood was aroused. He longed to find himself behind seven straining backs. He longed for the quick snap of the ball,

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for the surge of the line, for the glorious give and take of the interference.

"They won't throw me that way when I get used to their game," he told himself. He rubbed his thigh gingerly.

He was anxious now for another chance, anxious to show Carlson that he couldn't be handled so easily. There wouldn't be any football until Monday. Gosh! Monday was three whole days away.

When he reached home there was an errand to do. Afterwards he climbed to the attic and brought down his football things—moleskin pants, canvas jacket and jersey. He hung them out on the line to air.

They were there when Bob came home from the foundry. He looked at them a moment.

"Football, Bud?"

"Yes. We start practice Monday."

Bob ran his fingers over his chin. Buddy waited for him to speak; but abruptly he walked into the house.

"Huh!" the boy reflected. "Something's up."

When Bob left the dining room after supper, Buddy thought he had gone to get his algebra. Instead, Bob came back with his hat in his hands.

"Feel like walking?" he asked.

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Buddy jumped up. "Where?"

"Oh, just a walk. Come along."

They strolled down the road to the first corner, and turned into the side street.

"Buddy," Bob said abruptly, "you'll have to cut out football."

"Not play football at all?" the boy asked incredulously.

"That's what I mean."

"You didn't stop me playing at grammar school."

"This is different."

They passed under the feeble brightness of a street lamp. Buddy stole a look at his brother's face. One glance was enough. Bob was in earnest.

"*I want* to play football," Buddy said resentfully. "Carlson is thinking of starting me at quarterback——"

"There are bigger things than football," said Bob.

Buddy fell into a sulking silence. Only today he had joyously hung his football things on the line. Only today he had been tackled and thrown and had hungered for more. Now all his high hopes were torn and scattered.

"Father died when I was your age," Bob said. "I had to go to work. I'm not kicking. I only want

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to make sure you see this thing as I see it. I had to go to work. I never had a day at high school."

Buddy stared straight ahead. Gosh! Just because Bob hadn't been able to go to high school was he going to spoil a fellow's fun?

"Last spring," Bob went on, "they needed a new assistant foreman at the foundry. Remember?"

"You expected to get it," said Buddy.

"I expected to get it," said Bob. "I didn't. Do you know why?"

"No."

"Because I lacked education. I never had a chance at high school. That's the reason I'm studying algebra nights."

"How do you know you didn't get it because you lacked education?"

"They told me so," said Bob. He put a hand on his brother's shoulder. "I want you to study. I want you to be able to take your chances when they come to you. The first few months of high school are hard—new studies, new methods. I don't want you distracted. I want all your energies directed to your books. In the spring you can play baseball, and next fall you can have your crack at football. But this fall—— I want you to get started right," he said.

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They walked a while in silence.

"Can we go home now?" Buddy asked.

Bob sighed. "I thought you were more of a man than that," he said.

When they reached home the football things were still on the line. Buddy took them down and silently carried them indoors.

For a long time that night he tossed in bed and did not sleep. He was sore and angry and resentful. He thought that Bob was running to extremes. Other fellows had gone out for football their freshman year and their studies had not suffered. He told himself disloyally that Bob was become a croaker, a trouble-hunter, an old woman. At any other time he would have been ashamed of such thoughts. Just at present, however, they raced through his brain.

But not for a moment did he think of disobeying.

Next day Wally came around and talked football for an hour. Buddy listened in a painful silence. As nearly as he could gather Carlson's plan had been accepted with a hurrah. Boys were talking about getting such a fine, early start that they'd clean up all the smaller teams and even win from Irontown. To win at football from Irontown! Ah! That was the dream of every Fairview boy. Irontown—the

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same Irontown that championed clean athletics—had two hundred boys from which to select an eleven. She had a paid coach. Fairview had never beaten her on the gridiron, but each year the dream was dreamed.

That afternoon Carlson rode past the house on his bicycle. "Monday," he yelled, and waved his hand.

Buddy swallowed a lump in his throat.

He hadn't told anybody that he could not play, not even Wally. He had promised to come out, and now he was afraid of what Carlson and the others would say. What excuse could he make? That Bob wouldn't let him? They'd laugh at him.

All day Sunday he gloomed. He met Wally; but Wally wanted to talk nothing but football, so he soon walked away. He met Arthur Stone. The pitcher also wanted to talk football. Buddy went home.

His jacket and pants and jersey were in his room. He carried them up to the attic and dumped them on the floor, not bothering to put them away.

Monday was a day of wonderful fairness, but its glory meant nothing to him. The morning passed. Two o'clock came—then half-past.

"They're at it," he muttered, wondering if

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they were looking for him. He took his hat and walked away from the house.

He didn't want to go near the field, yet he couldn't stay away. Finally he approached the practice with cautious steps. He watched from the shadow of a tree on the outskirts of the field. He was so far away that the plays all looked confusing. But at least this was football, and his heart ached to be in it.

Suddenly came a formation that was open and wide. The line spread out. The ball was snapped.

"Forward pass," Buddy breathed.

Out around the end shot a boy with head the color of bricks.

Buddy gasped. "Carrots O'Toole."

He stepped away from the tree, forgetting that he did not wish to be seen. After what Drake and Mr. Swayze had said, Carrots O'Toole playing with the high school eleven!

For a while he stood there thinking. At length he started for home. The gloom was gone from his face. He had grieved because he could not play football for Fairview High. Now he did not care.

CHAPTER III

A BAD SEASON

LATE that afternoon Carlson and Wally Hamilton came down to the house. Buddy had been expecting some such visit. Yet, at sight of the football captain, his heart began to beat heavily.

"Where were you?" Carlson asked. "You're a fine one to forget practice."

"I didn't forget," Buddy answered.

"Why weren't you around?"

"I'm not going to play."

Carlson's face became hard. "Why not?"

Buddy looked down at the ground. He couldn't tell about Bob's lost promotion. That was a family matter and not to be given to village boys for their gossip.

"I—— Oh, I'm not going to play," he said. "I have a reason. Next fall I'll come out, but not this year."

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Carlson came a step closer. "The team needs you," he said. "You've got to come out."

Buddy shook his head.

And at that the hard look came to Carlson's eyes again. "You're afraid," he taunted. "I thought you were scared when I tackled you, and now I know it. You're afraid to come out. You're afraid you'll get hurt. I wouldn't have you on the team now if you begged to play."

"I'm not afraid," Buddy cried shrilly.

Carlson laughed. "Show me," he said. "Come out and play." He had quite forgotten that only a moment before he had said that he wouldn't have Buddy on the team.

Buddy felt that he was in a trap. If he played he would be breaking Bob's command. If he didn't play Carlson would brand him as a coward. And yet there was only one thing to do.

"I won't play," he said. He stared down the cool village street until Carlson's broad back turned the corner. Then he turned miserably to Wally.

"I'm not scared of a tackle," he said.

"Chowder!" cried Wally. "Of course you're not." He was silent a moment. "Carrots practiced today," he said.

"I know it," Buddy answered.

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Wally gave him a quick glance. "It isn't because of Carrots, is it?"

Buddy shook his head. "I couldn't play if Carrots never came near the field."

"Oh, well," Wally said carelessly, "lots of the other schools probably use ringers, anyway."

School opened a week later. By that time the report had run among the village boys that Buddy was afraid to play with the high school team. In some strange fashion Bob heard the gossip. The Saturday before school began he took Buddy to see the moving pictures at the Opera House.

"Like it?" he asked on the way home.

Buddy sighed. "It was great."

"We'll go every Saturday," Bob said. "Perhaps we can get Mother to come along."

Buddy frowned thoughtfully. That night before going to bed he opened the door that led to his brother's room.

"Bob!"

"Yes?"

"I'm not sore about football," he called. As he crept between the sheets he heard Bob trying to whistle a tune that the pianist at the Opera House had played.

Buddy's first day at the Fairview High School

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was filled with trials. Mr. Minor, the principal, made the students a short address of welcome. He told them to remember that every act of theirs would reflect either credit or discredit on the school.

"Buddy Jones take notice," a voice whispered.

Buddy flushed. When the students were dismissed and assigned to their classes, he found himself out in the corridor next to Carlson.

"Hello, Tender-Bones," said the football captain.

Buddy flushed again. All morning he heard whispered remarks about himself. However, he had decided that silence was the best policy. By noon the sharp edge was gone from the hazing. Three or four boys of his class walked part way home with him, and not once was football mentioned.

Buddy was not foolish enough to think that he was out of the woods. He knew that from time to time there would be sudden turns of sentiment against him. Carlson, he thought, would see to it that he had many a bad half-hour.

When he came back for the afternoon session the field adjoining the high school swarmed with boys. As though by magic two goal posts had gone up. Carlson was directing the work. Poole looked on.

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"What's that for?" Buddy asked. "Aren't we using the village field this year?"

"Carlson wanted it," Poole answered. "You know how it is with the village field—some fellows go home with their books and don't show up for an hour. This way they can leave their books in their desks and get busy as soon as school ends."

Buddy stared out at the field. "Did they get everything done since twelve o'clock?"

"Not much. They laid out the field three days ago. The A. A. bought the lumber. All Carlson had to do was to put the goal posts up."

"Whose idea was it, Carlson's?"

"Carrots O'Toole's," said Poole. After a moment he asked: "Any—any chance of you playing football?"

Buddy shook his head.

Poole sighed. "Carlson's got me in at quarter," he said, and turned away.

After school that day Buddy waited to watch the practice. Carrots was on the field, and it soon became apparent that he wielded heavy influence. Carlson weighed carefully all that he said. It was Carrots this and Carrots that, and it was Carrots who advised the other boys how to play their positions.

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The team lined up. The ball was snapped. The play went wrong. Carlson swung around and scowled at Poole.

"It was your own fault," Poole said hotly. "You weren't there to take the ball."

"Line up!" Carrots chided. "This isn't a kindergarten."

They lined up again. Soon another play went wrong. One of the tackles growled at Poole.

It seemed to Buddy that Poole was the target for every boy on the team. An argument broke out and Carlson seemed unable to maintain order. Carrots walked to one side, lit a cigarette, and patiently waited for the trouble to smooth itself out.

"Who is that red-haired boy?" said a voice in Buddy's ear.

He looked back. Mr. Minor, the principal, had asked the question.

"That's O'Toole, sir."

"A high school boy?"

"No, sir."

"Thank you, Jones."

The players resumed their positions. Carrots threw away his cigarette. For a while the plays went better. When Buddy looked around again Mr. Minor was gone.

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After a time the practice ended. Most of the players immediately crowded around Carlson, and a new argument developed. Then the football captain saw Buddy.

"You can *watch* football, can't you?" he shouted.

Buddy did not reply. Some of the players looked at him with distrust. He started for home. In a few moments Wally Hamilton overtook him.

"Fine bunch," the center said calmly. "This team will get licked all over the lot."

"It doesn't seem to worry you much," Buddy said.

"Why should it?" Wally asked in surprise. "I play the game. It's no hair off my head if Carlson can't manage the fellows."

To Buddy's way of thinking this was a mighty strange philosophy. However, he made no comment. Neither did he remark that Mr. Minor had asked about Carrots. The talk turned to Poole.

"Carlson's making a bad mistake," Wally said wisely. "He's sore because you didn't come out and he's making Poole the goat. That's bad, because Poole's the nervous kind. Anyway——"

Wally stopped.

"Anyway what?" Buddy asked.

"I don't think Poole feels right about the team."

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There was a moment's silence.

"Carrots?" Buddy asked, and Wally nodded.

Buddy was not surprised. Poole had talked in a vague way and had said nothing definite, yet he was sure that Poole wanted Fairview High to play with a clean slate.

The days ran on. Carlson fussed and worried, and quarreled with the players. Carrots carried himself with a high, superior air. Poole, harassed and upset, made sorry work of his position. The eleven, for all its early start, seemed to get nowhere.

One afternoon Buddy remained in after classes for some help in mathematics. When he came out of school the practice was over. The players and the spectators were gone. He walked out on the field and for a time wandered back and forth between the goal posts. He stood on the twenty-yard line and swung his foot, and wondered if he was still able to lift the ball over the bar.

Presently he turned back. Poole was standing on the high school steps, watching him.

"Hello!" Buddy greeted. "I thought all you fellows had gone home."

"I went into the school to read the constitution and by-laws of the A. A.," Poole explained. He fell into step. They walked off together.

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"It's a queer constitution," Poole said. "All about who shall be members, and how much dues, and how money should be paid out."

"Wasn't that what you were looking for?"

"No. I wanted to see how much authority the A. A. had, and there isn't a word about the A. A. having any authority."

"Authority for what?" Buddy asked, puzzled.

"Authority to run the teams."

"But the captains do that."

"I mean authority to run the teams over the captain's heads," said Poole.

Buddy drew in a quick breath. So that was it!

"I don't like Carrots in the line-up," Poole went on determinedly. His eyes weren't dreamy now. "I said so to Carlson."

"And what did Carlson say?"

"He told me that he was running things and that if I didn't like it I could quit."

"But you're the only quarterback," Buddy cried.

"That's the reason I didn't quit," Poole said.

For a minute or two there was silence. Then:

"I don't know where I'm at," Poole sighed. "I ought to quit, and yet if I do the team suffers. They didn't come to any agreement at Irontown. The schools were asked to talk things over. But if we're

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going to be for clean athletics later we ought to be for clean athletics now. Isn't that so?"

Buddy nodded.

"Then tell me this," Poole demanded: "should I play?"

Buddy refused to answer. Carrots, he thought, had no business on the team. On the other hand, Poole was the only quarterback. The problem was too big.

"I guess there's nothing for me but to stick," Poole said after another silence. "If I thought for a minute that the school had promised anything at that Irontown meeting I wouldn't play. Why in blazes didn't Carrots get a job that would keep him busy all week?"

Ten days later Hasbrouck High School came to the village for the first game. Carrots gained a vast amount of ground, but he could not play the whole game alone. Twice Poole fumbled, and three times plays went altogether wrong. Fairview lost, 25 to 7. Carrots made the only touchdown, and Carlson kicked goal.

Three days later the team played Garrison High, and again it tasted defeat. Never before had Fairview lost to Garrison. Carlson was sore enough to bite holes in an oak plank.

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The following week the team played two games away from home. Both resulted in defeats. By this time the school was demanding that Carlson get busy and win a game. The eleven itself was disorganized. The practice grew steadily worse.

Buddy could look on at the afternoon drills and feel no burning desire to play. Yet, for all that, he began to resent the string of defeats. After Garrison had won he had told himself that it served the team right for playing a ringer. But now a loyalty that was too deep for such satisfaction made him want to see the team win. After all, it was his school.

He began to stay a while at the practice each afternoon. His sympathies were with Poole, and presently he took to watching to see if there might not be some way in which Poole's playing could be improved.

The first day he came away thoughtfully. The second day he followed the practice up and down the field with an absorbed air. When the work ended he straightened up with a sigh. Yesterday's thought was now a certainty. Poole was not entirely to blame. Wally Hamilton's passing was bad.

He waited for the players to scatter. Finally Wally came along. They walked off together.

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"Well," said Wally, "how were we today?"

Buddy shook his head. "There's one thing that spoils a lot of plays," he said.

"What's that?"

"The passing."

Wally stopped short. "I do the passing."

Buddy said nothing.

Wally fell into step again. "Let's have it," he said. For once his air of indifference was gone.

Buddy explained that his passing was uneven—now hard, now gentle, now high, now low, and occasionally off to the side.

"Why didn't Poole tell me?" Wally wanted to know.

"I guess Carlson has him so worried he doesn't know good passing from bad," Buddy answered wisely.

Wally came to his corner. Instead of turning down he kept right on. His mouth, somehow, looked different.

"You're sure about this?" he said after a silence.

Buddy nodded.

"All right. I'm not in love with extra work, but if you're sure that settles it. I'm going to bring Poole around. You show us that passing trick, will you?"

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Buddy said he would.

"Carrots has to work tomorrow," Wally added. "There's never much practice the day Carrots works. I'll bring Poole here as soon as Carlson lets us off."

Late next afternoon the center and the quarter-back came to Buddy's house. In a spot in the rear of the garden the lesson began. It was almost dark when the boys stopped. Bob had come home from work, had looked on for a while, and had then gone into the house with an understanding grin.

Poole mopped his face. "That did go better, didn't it?"

"It will go better than that," said Wally. "Chowder! Think of your being blamed all season for what was my fault."

Buddy went in to supper feeling a new respect for his chum. Wally might be indifferent to many things, but he was willing, at least, to shoulder his own burdens.

"Showing them how?" Bob asked.

Buddy nodded. "They picked it up in a hurry," he said.

"Is that the last lesson?" Bob asked indifferently.

"The first and the last," said Buddy. At that Bob began to whistle vigorously. After supper he suggested a visit to the moving picture house, but

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Buddy sighed and said he had better stick to his books because mathematics was giving him some trouble. And at that Bob whistled all the harder.

Next day Buddy watched the practice for half an hour. It seemed to him that the plays ran smoother. Certainly there was far less wrangling.

The fifth game was with Gates High School, and again Fairview lost. But this time the score was 6-0. The whole school experienced a sudden quickening of courage. Gates had a good team. The closeness of the score meant that Fairview was improving.

A larger number of students began to stay after school for the practice. The eleven lost its hopeless air and began to look alive. A transformation had taken place. Carlson's face became cheerful. Carrots began to complain that they didn't give a fellow time to smoke a cigarette.

"Huh!" grunted Buddy. "I'd like to see him out there with a cigarette if I were captain."

Next morning, at assembly, Mr. Minor, the principal, said mildly that he had observed smoking on the football field.

"For several years," he said, "cigarettes have been barred from this school. I hope I shall not have to mention this matter again."

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Two days later when Carrots came around again for practice Carlson took him aside and talked earnestly. At first Carrots appeared to be rebellious, but in the end he surrendered. There was no smoking that afternoon.

Next day came a return game with Hasbrouck High School at Hasbrouck. Carrots had to work on the huckster's wagon, and Carlson took along a substitute. The school, remembering that Fairview had lost to Hasbrouck earlier in the season by 25 to 7, was not over enthusiastic about the game.

The unexpected happened. The team that had lost with Carrots in, now won with Carrots out. The final score was 14-6. The team rode back to Fairview and was given an ovation as it climbed down from the stage at the post office. For Carlson had telephoned in the news of the victory, and high school boys had spread the tidings through the town.

Buddy was one of those who welcomed the victorious team. He caught Poole's sleeve.

"How did it go?"

"All right," said Poole. "Good game."

Buddy found Wally.

"Chowder!" cried the center. "You should have

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seen Poole. He picked up a fumble and ran fifty-five yards."

Buddy turned quickly and looked for Poole; but the quarterback was gone.

The victory seemed to give Fairview the spark it needed. In a business-like way the team proceeded to win from Bloomfield, from Pompton and from Gates. There was talk in the school of taking up a collection and having the team photographed and hanging the photograph in the auditorium. Buddy wondered whether Carrots O'Toole would be allowed to sit in the picture. However, the plan fell through, and with it went that particular problem of the red-haired boy.

Brunswick High School came to Fairview with a reputation, and departed with its reputation gone. The old dream of winning from Irontown came back in alluring form. The window of the stationery store adjoining the post office suddenly blossomed with flags of blue and white, and on each flag was this word—FAIRVIEW.

One morning Buddy found Poole staring in through the stationery store window.

"Fairview," the quarterback said wistfully. "Wouldn't it have been fine if we could have won all those games without Carrots?"

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Only three games were left—Saddle River, Garrison, and then Irontown. The Saddle River game would be a fight, but Garrison—— Well, for years Garrison had come just before Irontown, so that the team could get a light workout. Garrison had never been taken seriously. True, she had won earlier in the fall, but that was before Fairview had got going. Now she was expected to prove the same easy picking as of old, and the game would be played the usual way—first half, the regulars and enough points to win; second half, the substitutes.

The Saddle River High School lived up to its reputation when it came to Fairview. It played hard, driving football. But for all that Fairview won. As soon as the game was over, the students crowded out on the field and surrounded the victorious team.

"Fellows," said Carrots, "we've got to hand it to Poole and Wally. It's the way they handle that ball that got this team going."

"Buddy Jones coached us on our passing," Poole spoke up.

Buddy had crowded out with the others. Now, however, he tried to sneak away. Then he heard Carlson's angry voice:

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"Forget it, Carrots. The whole team has improved."

That evening Wally came around to Buddy's house. "Poole let slip about your coaching," he said.

"I know it," Buddy answered. "I was there."

"Did—did you hear what Carlson said?"

"Yes."

Wally whistled a few bars of a song. "Carlson's the prize bone-head," he said presently. "Well, I've got to get home and do some studying."

Next morning Buddy found the students more friendly than they had been since school opened. Boys who had taunted him were anxious to make amends. But Buddy took his honors quietly. He refused to talk football, he refused to tell how much or how little he had done. He was in the doorway with half a dozen boys when Carlson appeared and pushed through them.

"Don't block the way," he growled.

During the noon hour the news leaked through the school that Carlson wasn't satisfied with the quarterback-center playing. He was going to adopt a new style.

"Some fellows," Wally said calmly, "never know when they're well off."

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When school closed for the day the students hurried out and lined the sides of the field. What was Carlson going to do? They saw the captain with Poole and Wally. Poole, instead of standing directly behind the center, was now standing sideways and taking the ball with his hands low down and out from his body.

After ten minutes of this the captain called the eleven together. But before the signal drill started he walked over to a group of boys at the nearest sideline.

"Taking the ball in front was all wrong," he said. "Poole had to swing all the way around to pass it. He'll move faster now and the whole team will speed up."

The group said not a word.

"I meant to do this long ago," Carlson hastened to add, "only Poole and Wally were stubborn about doing things their own way. I wish outsiders would keep their hands off."

"But the team has been winning," a voice said mildly.

Carlson flushed. "The scores should have been higher," he said angrily, and trotted out to his players.

Buddy did not wait that day to see what change

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would come. He thought that were he to stand around he would only draw attention to himself. He went home directly his class was dismissed. He had an idea that Wally would come and tell him all that happened. Nor was he mistaken. The center came along as the streets were darkening with the purple shadows of a fall evening.

"Good night, team," he said. "Poole's off the track again, and the plays are fierce. Carlson says we'll be all right by tomorrow."

"Maybe you will be," said Buddy.

"Maybe nothing," the center retorted. "He changed things because he's sore you coached. If the team wins from Irontown he doesn't want anybody to say that you did it. Now, if the team wins, he'll get all the credit."

School loyalty prompted Buddy to say that his chum was wrong, but somehow the words would not come. Wally swung his head-guard against the pickets of the fence.

"Poole walked part way with me," he said. "There's a queer eel for you. He says it was bound to come—that Carlson used a ringer and the ringer brought all this trouble. Poole says it's justice."

Buddy wrinkled his forehead. "How did Carlson bring this trouble?"

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"By talking about the fine passing. If he hadn't said that, Poole wouldn't have told that you had coached. What do you think of him saying it's justice? I think he's a nut."

But Buddy wasn't quite so sure. Sometimes Poole had an uncanny way of figuring things out.

"Well," said Wally, "it's no hair off my head. I wish Carlson luck, that's all. Maybe the Garrison game will wake him up."

The Garrison game, in fact, woke up the whole school. For what was to have been a nice little practice as a preparation for Irontown, developed into a battle that surged back and forth across the field. The substitutes didn't play the second half, for the simple reason that the first half had resulted in a scoreless tie. So the veterans went back, and though they won finally 14 to 6, there was no sunshine nor glory in the victory. The students felt that the bottom had been kicked out of their bucket of hope.

There were still five days left before the Irontown game, and much can be done in five days. Hopeful students asked Carlson if he was going to go back to the old style of passing.

"What's the matter with the new style?" the captain demanded.

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"Why," said his questioner, "it seemed to—to mess things somewhat and——"

"You let me run the team," Carlson retorted. "What it seems to you fellows on the lines and what it seems to us on the field are different things. The team had an off day. We'll be all right."

When the team lined up for practice that afternoon Carlson ordered no change in the passing. Wally grinned.

"What are you laughing at?" Carlson demanded angrily.

"Me?" Wally seemed surprised. "I was just thinking how much punishment some fellows can take."

Carlson's face turned red. Before he could say what was on the tip of his tongue Carrots O'Toole had him by the arm and led him away. For five minutes, while Carrots and the captain argued, the players stood around and did nothing. Finally the two boys walked back.

"Line up," Carrots cried quickly. "A little life into it, now. Here's where we make them open their eyes."

But the practice, instead of being an eye-opener, was slow enough to be a dead march. When Carlson at last called a halt the players were sore and

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tired. Carrots, however, was as lively as ever. He managed to stick close to Wally, and when the center walked from the field Carrots had him by the arm.

"Don't pay any attention to Carlson," he said. "He's all out of sorts from the Garrison game. Let him ride you if he wants to."

Wally's face was innocent. "Is he going to ride me?" he asked.

"Oh, beans," cried Carrots. "You know what I'm talking about. If a scrap breaks out now everything will go to smash."

"Why should a scrap break out?"

"Well, you're Buddy's friend and his sort of passing has been ruled off——"

"What passing do you like the best?" Wally asked.

Carrots said something under his breath, swung around and walked back toward the field. Wally gave a slow smile.

"Don't think much of the new passing yourself, do you?" he muttered.

The big game was to be played at Irontown. Buddy had hoped to go, but there was wood to be chopped, the roof of the chicken house had to be patched and painted, and manure had to be spread

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over the flower beds. He went down to the post office and saw the team off. When the stage had disappeared down the road he turned slowly and walked home to do his chores.

There was a pool parlor and bowling alley on Main Street, and Carlson had promised to telephone the score. By five o'clock that afternoon Buddy's work was done. He washed and walked down to the place. Twenty or more boys were loitering outside the door.

"No score yet," said one.

They waited, and the minutes passed. The foundry whistle blew six o'clock.

"What time did the game start?" a boy wanted to know.

"Two-thirty," came the answer.

"Ought to have been over an hour ago," said another.

Half an hour later the conviction grew that no telephone message would come. The boys scattered. Buddy went home to a cold supper. He explained where he had been. Bob told him to hurry or he'd be late for the moving pictures.

"Mother coming?" Buddy asked.

"Mother's upstairs dressing," Bob answered. "Shake it up. We'll do the dishes."

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Bob washed and Buddy dried. Just as the last dish was put away a knock came on the front door. Bob went out to the hall.

"O Bud!" he called. "Here's Wally."

Buddy hurried to the front door. Wally stood there breathing heavily.

"I must hurry home and take my sister to the pictures," he panted. "Did you get the score?"

"No."

"I didn't think Carlson would telephone. We were swamped 48 to 0."

Buddy whistled.

"Oh, that's not all," Wally cried. "Carlson made a speech to us on the way home. He lays it all to you. He says you spoiled our chances by teaching Poole and me a wrong system."

CHAPTER IV

BUDDY SIGNS A PAPER

BUDDY did not enjoy the moving pictures at the Opera House. He felt that he wanted nothing in the world so much as to march Carlson before the whole school and make him confess that he had lied. But as the football captain was too big a boy to be handled in this fashion, Buddy saw no way to win justice. Not for a moment did he doubt that the school would believe what the captain had said.

When the pictures were over Buddy followed his mother and Bob to the cool outdoors. Bob touched his arm.

"What's wrong, Bud?"

"Nothing."

"Yes, there is. You didn't watch that last picture at all."

Buddy shook his head. "Nothing's wrong," he insisted.

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But by the time he reached home he began to feel a desire to tell his troubles to someone. He went upstairs resolved to go straight to bed; yet, five minutes later, he found himself sitting in Bob's room and relating all that had happened.

"Let's straighten this out," said Bob. "Carrots is a ringer?"

"Yes."

"Nevertheless, you tried to help the team."

"No," said Buddy; "not the team—I tried to help Poole and the school. Carlson and Neale and some of the others run things, but the school's all right. The fellows are like Wally Hamilton—they're indifferent, they don't understand. Some day they're going to wake up and then there will be no more ringers."

Bob stared across the room thoughtfully.

"So Carlson blames you for the defeat," he said.

Buddy nodded.

"That shouldn't worry you. Your skirts are clear. Why should you care what Carlson or the team thinks? Of course, if you coached Poole and Wally with any idea of getting personal glory——"

"I didn't," Buddy cried quickly.

Bob smiled. "I know you didn't. But——"
He paused.

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Buddy flushed. "You mean I talk as though I'm sore about not getting credit."

Bob put a friendly hand on his shoulder. "I don't exactly mean that either, Buddy. I want to see you throw back your shoulders. I want to see you take a hard knock without flinching. And——"

"And what?" Buddy asked.

"Keep up the good fight," said Bob.

Afterwards, as he lay in bed, Buddy wondered what Bob had meant by the good fight.

In spite of what Bob had said about fretting under criticism, Monday morning found Buddy restless and ill at ease. Carlson was a big fellow in school—Carlson was the football captain. He, on the other hand, was the boy who had refused to play. The sympathy of the school, he was sure, would be all with Carlson. Wasn't Carlson a captain? A fellow had to have friends to be elected captain. Therefore, Carlson had friends and his friends would stick to him.

"You're not eating any breakfast, Leo," Mrs. Jones said anxiously.

"I'm not hungry this morning, Mother," Buddy said. He did not look at Bob.

When he started for school he tried to whistle

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cheerily, but the whistle was a failure. When he came in sight of the football field he saw with surprise that the goal posts had been taken down. Under the direction of Poole, boys were carrying the posts and the bars into the cellar of the high school.

Buddy stopped to watch. Arthur Stone nudged him in the ribs.

"Peach of a row this morning," the pitcher said in an undertone.

Buddy was interested. "What about?"

"The goal posts. Carlson wanted them left up. 'Look here,' said Poole, 'you're boss while the season is on, but now the season is over. The A. A. paid for those posts and they're going to be saved until next year. I want them down.' Mackerel! You should have heard him. I never knew Poole could put up a fight."

Buddy smiled quietly. "What did Carlson say?"

"Huh! He shut up like a clam. You—you heard about his speech after the game?"

Buddy nodded.

"Well, something has happened since then. He's not very cocky this morning."

Indeed, Carlson looked rather forlorn. He had not helped with the goal posts. Buddy saw him

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standing off to one side and scowling and biting his lips.

"That was a fool speech he made," Arthur whispered. "Most of the fellows think he was trying to shift the blame on to you. Oh, I know. I've been talking to them. So has Poole. So has Wally Hamilton."

Buddy went in to classes feeling that a great weight had been lifted from his mind. Why, he had friends, too. Before the noon recess arrived his worry was completely gone. The school, instead of blaming him for the defeat, thought that Carlson had invited disaster by changing a winning system.

Twice that morning, in going from one classroom to another, Buddy passed Carlson in the corridors. Each time the football captain pretended to be interested in papers he carried.

That afternoon, when school ended for the day, Buddy found Wally waiting.

"Carrots and Carlson are on the outs," the center said. "They had a beautiful row about you."

"About me?" Buddy thought his ears had tricked him.

"About you," Wally said calmly. "Carrots thought all along that Carlson made a mistake when

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he changed the passing. But he kept his mouth shut, thinking that we might win anyway. Then, coming home in the stage, Carlson made his speech. That got Carrots sore. He told Carlson that he was a fool and that he was trying to slide the blame onto you."

"Did they have a fight before the team?" Buddy asked in surprise.

"Oh, no. It was after the stage had reached Fairview and we had separated. But they got talking louder and louder. A lot of fellows heard them. Carlson told Carrots to mind his own business, and Carrots told him if he had let the passing alone there might have been a different story. Carrots was mighty sore. Since then they haven't spoken to each other."

Buddy felt like pinching himself to see if he was awake. This certainly was a day of surprises. He had expected the school to blame him for the defeat, and instead the school treated him as though he had done some mighty good work. Now he learned that Carrots O'Toole, of all fellows, had sided with him. Of a sudden he found a respect for the rough-and-ready huckster boy rising in his heart. It was not that Carrots had championed him. Rather it was that Carrots had had the cour-

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age to stand against his friend for what he thought was right.

"I've been studying Carrots this season," said Wally. "He's a tough nut, but he's square. He doesn't look at things the way you do nor the way Poole does. Just the same in his own way he plays fair."

"I guess he does," said Buddy. He could understand now why Carlson had let him alone. The football captain was afraid that Carrots might go on the war-path and tell the school what he thought of the defeat.

That night Buddy brought a glorious appetite to the supper table. Bob gave him a wink.

"Everything go all right today?"

"Oh, yes."

"What did Carlson have to say?"

"Nothing."

In truth, Carlson was for the present thoroughly cowed. Disaster had overwhelmed him. Now that it was too late he was sorry that he had interfered with the passing. Here and there, of course, he had expected to find boys who would condemn him. But he had not expected Carrots to be one of these. Carrots had done more than silence him. Carrots had sent him running for cover.

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He had planned that as soon as the Irontown game was over he would hold practice for boys who had not been good enough for this year's team. Poole had ruled otherwise, and he had not had the courage to argue. He had stood in silence and had watched the goal posts come down. He, Carison, who had a reputation as a scrapper, had been faced down by little Poole, the dreamer. He wondered what in the world the school thought of him.

As a matter of fact the school didn't give him a thought. It had all it could do to think about Poole. No longer was the president of the A. A. a dreamer. He had developed overnight, it seemed, into a chap who could give orders and get things done. Boys who had always made game of him now tried to become his friends.

But Poole, it seemed, wasn't fishing for friends. He had the goal posts safely locked in the high school cellar. He quietly withdrew into the background and made no effort to trade on his achievement. Boys who had expected him to keep doing things once he had started were disappointed. By degrees he ceased to be a wonder. The school settled down into its accustomed activities. Gradually the football season was forgotten by all save

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Carlson and Neale—and Neale kept making efforts to bring Carlson and Carrots together again.

Winter came early that year ; and with the coming of the first snow the high school yawned and prepared for a dull season. True, both the senior and the junior classes gave a dance each winter and there was always a play by the Dramatic Association. But everybody took the dances as a matter of course, and nobody became excited over the play except the important young people who held rehearsals three times a week. Winter, to the Fairview High School, was a time of sackcloth and ashes. There was no basket ball team, no track team, no hockey team—nothing but two class dances and a Dramatic Association play.

The February meeting of the A. A. brought the first break in the winter's monotony. Neale was to read the baseball schedule. For once, an A. A. meeting was well attended. Neale slowly read off a list of games. The last was with Irontown.

"So you see," he said to the students, "Irontown doesn't think we're an unclean bunch."

There was a laugh.

"Order!" Poole said calmly.

Buddy and Wally Hamilton walked home together from the meeting.

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"Foxy Neale," said Wally. "He's planning to use Carrots O'Toole in the box this spring, and he tried to find out where Poole stood."

"How?" asked Buddy.

"By making that crack about an unclean bunch. And Poole didn't say beans."

"But why should Neale worry about Poole?"

"Because he's afraid of him," Wally answered calmly. "Sounds funny, doesn't it? Well, it's true. Neale hasn't forgotten how Poole ordered Carlson aside and took down those goal posts."

Buddy looked thoughtful. Then he remembered a day when Poole had remained in school to search through the A. A. constitution for authority to go over a captain's head.

"No A. A. president ever said who could or couldn't play," he told Wally.

"No A. A. president ever took down goal posts until Poole did it," Wally answered.

Somehow, in that answer, Buddy had a vision of a new day that might be dawning at the Fairview High School.

In the week that followed Neale, on two occasions, waited outside the school for Poole. And on each occasion, as they walked off together, Carrots O'Toole joined them at the first corner as though

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by accident. Carrots and Neale seemed to do most of the talking. Poole, for the most part, listened in silence.

These maneuvers passed unnoticed by most of the boys. Wally Hamilton, however, was too sharp not to take heed.

"Didn't I tell you?" he demanded of Buddy. "Neale's hoping that Carrots and Poole will become friends."

"What difference would that make?" Buddy wanted to know.

"Why, Poole wouldn't object to a friend playing, would he?"

Buddy smiled. He was sure that Wally, for all his astuteness, did not know Poole.

"Chowder!" Wally sighed. "What a lot of fuss to kick up over a player! Carrots played with the eleven. What difference did it make? All the schools are booking baseball games with us."

"Did they know Carrots was a ringer?" Buddy asked.

"Well, maybe not." Wally paused a moment. "Anyway, I'll bet some of the other schools played ringers."

"That doesn't make it right," Buddy said.

"Good night!" Wally groaned. "If you and

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Poole get together there'll surely be some trouble."

But Poole, apparently, wasn't trying to get together with anybody. Two weeks later, when he received a letter from Drake, of the Irontown High School, he read it, wrote a few lines in ink underneath, and quietly pinned the communication to the bulletin board outside Principal Minor's office. There the school found it:

"PRESIDENT,

"Fairview High School A. A.

"DEAR SIR:

"You are already familiar with the movement that has been started for cleaner athletics among the schools of the county. The baseball season is almost here. Will your association kindly meet and determine just what part your school will take in seeing that nothing shall happen to mar the sport? This school will furnish, on request, a list of all its students.

"CHARLES A. DRAKE,

"Pres. Irontown High School A. A."

And under the letter this:

The Athletic Association will meet Friday next after school.

POOLE, *Pres.*

Five minutes after the letter had been read, Neale and Carlson were in earnest conversation. Wally Hamilton smiled knowingly.

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"Here's trouble now," he said. "See what Drake has done? Offers us a list of Irontown's students. We ought to offer a list of our students."

"Well," Buddy demanded, "why can't we?"

"Carrots O'Toole," said Wally.

Buddy gave a low whistle. So that was it!

"Poole on one side," Wally added, "and Carlson and Neale on the other. You'll see some fine old wire-pulling this week."

The wire-pulling, however, was all done by Carlson and Neale. They button-holed boys and held long and earnest conversations. Poole resorted to no such tactics. He went his way serene and untroubled. Several times boys asked him what was going to happen and his answer was always the same—it was up to the school. At first Carlson and Neale watched him narrowly. Then, by degrees, the anxiety left their faces.

"They've got the votes," Wally said with conviction. "Poole's licked."

"There's more to this than Poole," Buddy said slowly.

"Is there?" Wally seemed surprised. "What?"

"The question of whether the school plays fair or foul."

"Chowder!" cried Wally. "Neale and Carlson

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ought to hear that." But, for the remainder of the walk home, he was strangely silent.

Friday afternoon, as soon as classes were dismissed, the students crowded into the assembly hall. Poole sat up at the president's desk. Carlson and Neale sauntered in carelessly. In a few moments Poole called the meeting to order.

He read the letter that had come from Drake. He laid it on the desk. There was a moment of silence. Then:

"Will Rotherham please take the chair?" Poole asked.

Rotherham, a tall, thin boy, went forward. Poole came down among the students.

"Fellows," he said, "this is the biggest question that the Fairview High School has ever had to face. It's a question of honor. It isn't a question of friendship. It isn't something where friends and cliques must stand together. It's bigger than all that. For that reason I haven't tried to influence a single fellow's vote."

Neale flushed.

"Irontown has started this fight for clean athletics and Irontown is in earnest. She has offered us a list of her students. What are we going to do? Are we going to refuse to tell her who our students

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are? Are we going to have her say, 'There's something rotten at Fairview'?"

"Quit your knocking," called a voice.

"I'm not knocking," Poole answered. "I'm as loyal to my school as any fellow here. But I want to be proud of her, too—and I can't if she won't play fair."

"Did the football team play fair?" another voice asked.

"No," Poole answered instantly.

"You played just the same."

"I was the only quarterback the school had," Poole said. "Maybe it was a mistake for me to play. Anyway, I stuck. I said to myself, 'Some day the school will see that this is wrong.' And now you fellows *must* see that it's wrong. Irontown offers us her student list. Doesn't that sound like fair play? Don't you want Fairview to play fair, too?"

"I do," said Arthur Stone.

"Sit down," Carlson cried angrily. Neale laid a hand on his arm. Carlson became quiet. Plainly the baseball captain was the leader today.

"That's all," said Poole. "It's up to you now whether you go out of this meeting with your heads held high or with your heads hanging."

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He walked back to the president's chair. Neale stood up.

"I'm going to vote against sending any student list," he said, "and I'm not going to hang my head. Why should I? Why should you if you vote against the plan? Where did it come from, anyway? From Irontown. She's got a paid coach. She's got a big gym in the basement of the school. She has her own athletic field with a running track and wooden stands. Are we going to let her tell us what we must or must not do?"

"No!" cried a dozen voices.

"Anyway," Neale went on, "this sending out a list is all fake. Irontown sends us a list. Then a team comes here to play. Suppose they tell us their catcher is named Marshall. We look up their student list. We find a Marshall. That's all right. But how do we know that that catcher's name is really Marshall? He may be a ringer using Marshall's name.

"That's one reason I'm against this. It opens the door to a lot of funny work. Let's go on as we have been going. I guess our teams are as square as any of the others. And if there's anything here that needs fixing I guess we can fix it without any help from Drake."

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Neale sat down. Wally whispered that he hadn't said a word about fair play. Buddy nodded. Neale's talk, he thought, was an attempt to make it look as though Irontown was trying to dictate. The baseball captain sought to arouse the feeling that the small school often holds against the large school.

In this Neale succeeded. Poole made another plea, but few of the students paid any attention. Cries of "Vote!" arose. So Poole put the question. Only eight boys voted to send a list to Irontown. Wally Hamilton stood with the majority.

Poole took his defeat without comment. As Buddy came out of the school building he saw Carrots O'Toole waiting to hear the result.

That night Wally came around to Buddy's house.

"Funny thing about that meeting this afternoon," he said. "Every fellow you meet wants to stop and tell you why he voted as he did. It's just as though they were trying to excuse themselves."

"Excuse themselves about what?" Buddy asked.

"You can search me," Wally answered. "I voted the way I did because I think this stuff is all rot. What difference does it make who plays on a team as long as we have a good game?"

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"Why did Carlson play Carrots on the football team?" Buddy demanded instantly.

"To strengthen the team, of course."

"Then Carlson wasn't thinking about a good game—Carlson wanted to win."

"What difference does it make?" Wally demanded. "A game is only a game."

Buddy laughed ruefully. It seemed impossible to corner Wally. He was indifferent. He didn't care. That's all there was to it.

The school settled back to await the start of baseball practice. Poole notified Irontown that the Fairview High School would not make known its students. He flushed as he dropped the letter in the mail box. As he saw the situation, Fairview was convicting itself of unfair playing. He had an idea that Irontown might cancel its two ball games.

Instead, two weeks later came this note from Drake:

"PRESIDENT,

"Fairview High School A. A."

"DEAR SIR:

"A meeting will be held at Irontown High School Friday afternoon to take up the question of eligible players. Will you please send a representative?"

"CHARLES A. DRAKE,

"Pres. Irontown High School A. A."

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Poole pondered the letter. After school he showed it to Neale and Carlson.

"I won't go," said Carlson. "I'm not going to waste any time on that bunch."

Neale laughed. "Forget it, Poole. Drake's going crazy."

But Poole refused to be turned aside. "Somebody ought to go," he said. "It will look as though the school isn't interested."

"I'm not," Carlson admitted.

Poole flushed. Neale, as usual, tried to bring peace.

"Let Poole send one of the fellows," he suggested.

"I—I could send Buddy Jones," Poole said hesitatingly.

Carlson looked at Neale.

"Sure," said the baseball captain. "Let him go." Then as Carlson looked doubtful: "He's only a kid," Neale added. "He can't do anything."

"All right." Carlson nodded. "Send him along."

The captains walked away. Slowly a quiet smile spread across Poole's face.

An hour later Buddy was told of the arrangement.

"You can go, can't you?" Poole asked.

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"Oh, I can go," Buddy answered. "What am I to do?"

"Take part in the meeting."

"But suppose they vote on something."

"Oh!" said Poole. He looked at the ground a moment. "I'll fix that," he said.

Two days later he met Carlson and Neale in the school corridors.

"I have something in my pocket for you fellows to sign," he announced. He led them into a deserted classroom and produced a paper. They read it:

Leo Jones is herewith named as a delegate with power to represent Fairview High School at the athletic conference to be held at Irontown High School.

POOLE, Pres. *Fairview H. S. A. A.*
....., *Football Captain.*
....., *Baseball Captain.*

Carlson signed without question.

"With power," Neale repeated thoughtfully. "What does that mean?"

"We have to give him something to show he represents us, don't we?" Poole demanded.

"Yes."

"Well, are we going to give him a paper saying we're sending him without power?"

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Neale scratched his head.

"Oh, sign it," Carlson said impatiently.

Neale signed.

That night Buddy had the paper. He showed it to Bob.

"Ha—ah!" Bob said softly. "According to this paper anything you do binds the school."

"That's what Poole told me," Buddy answered.

He felt very big and important Friday afternoon when he took the stage for Irontown. But as soon as he reached the meeting room he felt small, indeed. Many of the other schools had sent men as their representatives. Buddy felt as though they would all laugh at him.

Instead, he was soon made to feel at home. After a time he found himself with Drake. The Irontown boy led him to one side.

"What's the matter with your school?" Drake asked with a smile.

Buddy grew red and looked down at the floor. Instantly Drake had a hand on his arm.

"I'm not trying to make you feel uncomfortable," he said earnestly. "I know how it is. A lot of the small schools don't understand. This fight for a different kind of athletics is something new—they're not used to it. But it's going to win out."

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"I know it is," said Buddy.

"Oh!" Drake looked at him in surprise.

"It's going to win out at Fairview," Buddy added. "There's nothing wrong with our bunch."

And at that Drake squeezed his arm harder. "You're all right," he said. "Are you with the nine?"

"Catcher."

"Catcher, eh? I don't think I'll try to do any stealing on you."

Buddy looked pleased. "I hope you don't," he said. "They tell me you're mighty fast."

Drake seemed pleased, too.

When the meeting was called to order, Buddy found a seat in the rear. His heart beat faster as he heard the pleas for clean athletics. Oh, wouldn't it be fine if fellows from his school felt that way?

Presently there was a lull. Drake jumped to his feet.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we will never get any place by just talking about it. We all know what we want. Let's cut loose and do something."

There were cries of "Good boy!" "That's the talk!"

Drake drew a paper from his pocket. "I have a resolution here," he said. "I'll read it to you. We,

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the undersigned, working for the cause of clean athletics, do hereby pledge our several schools as follows: First, that no person shall play on any athletic team who is not a bonafide student; second, that only such persons having a general percentage of seventy or over shall be deemed bonafide students."

There was silence.

"How many delegates will sign that pledge?" Drake demanded.

And then there was a stir. Voices cried, "I will." Drake raised his hand.

"The secretary will call the roll. Each school will please answer as its name is reached."

Buddy's heart gave a thump. He thought of Carrots O'Toole, and of Carlson, and of Neale. And then he thought of Poole—Poole who had pleaded for fairness and honor.

"Bloomfield High School," the secretary called.

"We'll sign," a boy answered.

Cheers. Buddy felt something tighten in his throat. If he signed his school would be bound. It would have to honor the pledge. Carrots——

"Brunswick High School."

"We'll sign," came the answer.

"Fairview High School."

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Buddy stood up. He thought that every delegate was watching him.

"Fairview," he said, and stopped. His voice seemed to catch. He cleared his throat. "Fairview High School will sign," he said distinctly.

And then a shout went up. He sank back in his seat. He had a feeling that they had all been waiting to see what Fairview would do. Well, for good or evil, the die was cast.

All during the ride home he sat in a corner of the stage thinking. When the post office was reached he swung to the ground. Not a soul was there—not even Poole. He was glad of that. Just at present he did not want to talk to anybody.

But as he came opposite the bowling alley the door swung open.

"Hello!" called Neale's voice. "Oh, Carlson. Here's Buddy."

The two captains came out to the sidewalk with a rush. They took Buddy's arms.

"Well," Neale asked genially, "what was the foolish stunt today?"

Buddy had a frightened feeling that a storm was about to break. He wanted it over as soon as possible.

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"They asked us to pledge ourselves not to play boys who weren't students," he said.

"Did they?" Neale's smile broadened. "And what did you do?"

"I—I signed."

"What?" Carlson shook his arm. "You signed? What did you sign?"

"I signed the pledge," Buddy answered.

For a moment there was silence. It seemed that Carlson was going to have a fit. Then, of a sudden, he found his voice.

"You little fool," he cried wrathfully, "what did you do that for?"

Neale drew a deep breath. "Stung!" he said bitterly. "We were the fools for letting him go."

CHAPTER V

THE FIRST GAME

IT seemed to Buddy that Carlson was going to strike him. He drew back a step. Then Neale's arm went out and restrained the football captain.

"Let him alone," Neale said. "He's not so clever as he thinks."

"You chump!" Carlson growled. "You can't use Carrots now."

"Can't I?" A smile came to Neale's face as though some happy thought had been born in his brain. His anger was gone. "There's more than two ways of skinning a cat."

Carlson stared doubtfully. And at that Neale broke into a laugh.

"Drake may be able to twist Buddy," he began, "but—— Say, did Drake have a talk with you before the meeting?"

Buddy nodded.

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"I thought so. Drake's got another think coming. I wasn't born yesterday. Come along, Carlson."

The two boys strode away. Buddy sighed. What a difference between them and the fellows he had met at Irontown. All at once it seemed to him that this was a losing fight. Pledge or no pledge, they would find a way to use Carrots O'Toole.

He didn't see Poole until next afternoon. The president came briskly up the stoop of his house.

"Got that paper giving you power?" he asked.

"It's inside," Buddy answered.

"Get it."

Buddy brought it out. Poole took it with an air of satisfaction.

"Now," he said, "let them say you had no right to sign."

"Oh!" cried Buddy. "Are they saying that?"

"They're talking that way, but they won't get very far." Poole smiled quietly. The thought came to Buddy that perhaps Poole had suspected that the delegates to Irontown might be asked to sign something. What a mystery the president of the athletic association was becoming! He seemed to have a hundred and one plans up his sleeve.

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Later in the day Wally came around. He had the appearance of a boy turning some grave problem in his mind.

"How many delegates signed?" he asked.

"All of them," Buddy answered.

"Do—do you think they meant it?"

"They meant every bit of it," Buddy said seriously. "I could feel it. They're really in earnest, Wally."

Wally scratched his chin. "If that's the case," he said, "Carlson and Neale might as well quit. Do you know what Neale's going to do?"

"No."

"He's going to have Carrots enter school—business course. He figures Carrots can hold on until the baseball season is over. No matter how hopeless a fellow is, Mr. Minor always gives him a couple of months before suspending him. That's what Neale is counting on."

Buddy's eyes narrowed. "Neale can't do that," he said.

"Why?"

"Because Carrots won't be a bonafide student. We signed a pledge that no student could play unless he had an average of over seventy per cent."

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"Was that part of the pledge?" Wally demanded.

"Yes."

"Chowder! Wait until Neale hears that." He gave a slow whistle. "They surely made it water-tight while they were about it, didn't they?"

"What was the use of having it any other way?" Buddy asked, and Wally said nothing.

Monday morning Carrots came to school, was enrolled and took a seat with the class studying book-keeping. He was flushed and embarrassed. At noon Neale passed Poole and Buddy.

"Didn't expect anything like that, did you?" he asked cheerfully.

"You know Carrots hasn't a chance to keep up with his class," Poole answered.

"He's a student, isn't he?" Neale grinned. "Let me see you fellows put anything over on me."

That afternoon Poole wrote to Irontown and asked for a copy of the pledge. Wednesday morning it came. At noon he tacked it to the bulletin board and walked home for dinner.

When he returned to school the bulletin board seemed to be a spot of great interest. Almost every student was in the corridor. Neale stepped out to meet the president of the athletic association.

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"That's going too far," he cried angrily. "Buddy had no right to sign anything about study percentages."

"No?" Poole took a paper from his pocket. "He went there with power, and you signed and gave him power. That's your name, isn't it?"

Neale backed away. "It's a trick," he cried. "We've been fooled. We'll fight this out."

But by the time school was dismissed all thought of fight seemed to have gone. There was the pledge. There was no getting away from it. And next day Carrots turned in his books and ceased to be a scholar.

"For two pins I'd punch you in the eye," he said to Buddy. "What have you got against me?"

"Nothing," said Buddy. "It—it's the principle of the thing, Carrots. It isn't fair for a fellow——"

"Aw, tell it to Sweeney," Carrots broke in. "You've got a grudge against me, that's what. Neale says all this fair-play stuff is fake. He ought to know. And if he asks me to pitch I'm going to pitch, see?"

Buddy made no comment.

There was one great aftermath of the Irontown meeting. Carlson and Carrots patched up their differences and became friendly again. Buddy

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thought that now three brains would be plotting against the Irontown agreement instead of two.

But there was very little plotting, for Neale thought that he had discovered a new loop hole.

"It's like this," he said to Carrots. "Poole and Buddy and a couple of others have gone crazy on this clean sport idea. Poole did a mighty slick thing when he got Carlson and me to sign that paper. But it won't last."

Carrots lit a fresh cigarette. "Poole seems to have the upper hand," he said bluntly.

"Just for the present," Neale soothed.

"If he's got it now, why won't he have it when the baseball season opens?"

"Because," said Neale, "that's a whole month away. Just now Poole and Buddy and the rest of them are ready for fight. They've won a little victory and they're all cocked up. If I said, 'Here, I'm going to pitch Carrots,' they'd raise the roof."

"Well?" Carrots demanded.

"So we go about this thing with diplomacy," Neale continued. "We say nothing. We get into the background. A week from now I'll call out the candidates. You come along to the field whenever you can. You pitch to Buddy. At first everybody says, 'Are they going to use Carrots?' And

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then they get used to seeing you around and they stop talking. And by and by I just naturally stick you in a game and nobody says a word. See?"

Carrots grinned. "That will be getting away with it, what?"

"I wasn't born yesterday," said Neale. "Now Carlson here would rush in and kick up a stew and get all the worst of it. That's not my style."

"I'd fight them to a finish," Carlson said angrily. "They make me sick."

"They make me sick, too," said Neale. "But I'm going to play wise. And there's something you don't want to forget."

"What's that?" Carrots asked.

"The school's with us. The fellows voted not to make our students known and they don't think much of this latest twist."

In this the baseball captain was right. The school thought that Buddy had gone entirely too far. He should have come back, they said, and have laid Drake's proposition before the athletic association. Instead, because Poole had hypnotized the captains into signing a paper, Buddy had tied the nine hand and foot. Arthur Stone was the only decent pitcher. How could a nine go through a season with one pitcher? They had to get another hurler. And

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here was Carrots O'Toole put out of business completely.

Buddy found himself in the bad graces of many of the students. Somebody drew a rough sketch on the blackboard of the algebra classroom. The drawing represented a boy with a very, very long nose, and under it was printed in rough letters: MR. FIX-IT JONES. The algebra teacher ordered the drawing erased, and Buddy tried hard not to look embarrassed.

"I'm afraid I got you into a peck of trouble," Poole said that afternoon.

"Somebody had to start it," Buddy said simply. After he had gone off Poole smiled with satisfaction. He had found an ally on whom he could rely—a boy who would stand by him and pay no attention to ridicule.

Buddy did not tell at home about the disfavor into which he had fallen. For a day or two he went his way apparently unruffled. Even Neale's greeting, "Hello, Bud; signed anything else for Drake?" appeared to cause him no concern. But at heart he was rapidly tiring of being treated as though he was a traitor to the school. Not that he thought of quitting or of changing his stand. But he longed for a time when he could talk to boys of his

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class on a footing of careless friendship, instead of being made to feel that he had fallen from grace.

It was just at this time that, coming from the school laboratory after classes one afternoon, he saw Mr. Minor standing in front of the bulletin board. The principal seemed to be engrossed in something. As Buddy approached the man looked up.

"Good afternoon, Jones."

"Good afternoon, sir."

"I was reading this pledge. You were the delegate to Irontown, were you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! You signed this, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah!" Mr. Minor looked away. Presently his eyes came back to the board. "Moral courage is a wonderful thing, Jones," he said. "The courage to say no and the courage to say yes. Well, I must get back to work. Good afternoon, Jones."

"Good afternoon, sir."

The principal disappeared into his private office. Buddy walked home. The courage to say no and the courage to say yes. Suddenly the boy's shoulders went back. He thought he understood what

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Mr. Minor meant, and at that moment he ceased to care what the fellows said or did.

Thursday a new notice went on the bulletin board. It was the call for baseball candidates to report for practice Monday afternoon. Neale himself tacked it in place; and the captain made sure that the announcement covered and completely hid from sight the copy of the Irontown pledge.

"Chowder!" Wally Hamilton said softly. "Neale's turned foxy again. He thinks the fellows will forget the pledge if they can't see it every day."

Neale, in fact, had turned foxy in more ways than one. From the moment the call went on the board he ceased to badger Buddy.

"It's like this," he said to Carlson. "Bud is my only decent catcher and I can't have him nursing a grudge. That would be bad. I'm going to make peace."

"I'd soak him one in the eye," said Carlson.

Buddy met the peace overtures halfway. He was willing to fight, should occasion require, for what he thought was right, but he saw no reason for going through life with a chip on his shoulder. If Neale wanted to be friendly, why he'd be friendly, too.

The early practice, Neale had decided, should be

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held on the football grounds. Afterwards, when the batters began to hammer the ball, the work could be transferred to the village field. There the high school windows would be safe.

Monday afternoon thirty-three boys reported. There wasn't much doing that day. The ground was too soft for infield work and too heavy for much moving about in the outfield. Arthur Stone pitched awhile to Buddy, but he made no effort to use speed or curves. He threw easily and lazily, and only in this was he particular—always he tried to make the ball go straight into Buddy's mitt. It was Art's belief that the time to start on control was with the first pitched ball.

Neale was here, there and everywhere. A dozen of the candidates, he knew, didn't have a chance. For the present, though, he allowed them to stick. The more boys on the field, the less chance of Carrots creating a sensation when he came out.

Poole looked on for awhile and then disappeared. Wally walked home with Buddy.

"Carrots wasn't there," he said. "That's funny."

"Why?" Buddy looked concerned.

"Neale doesn't give up so easily," Wally answered.

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Next day, when school was dismissed, Carrots O'Toole was calmly waiting outside with a ball and a glove.

Buddy's lips tightened. What did this mean? He glanced at Arthur Stone. Then Neale came striding toward them.

"You fellows don't mind Carrots working around with us, do you?" he asked cheerily.

"What kind of work?" Buddy demanded bluntly.

"Oh, just warming up. You don't mind him warming up, do you?"

"N—no," said Buddy. How could he object to that?

"Good!" Neale cried jovially. "It will give you practice, Bud, holding more than one style of delivery. All right, Carrots!"

Buddy put on his big mitt. Neale had said nothing about Carrots playing with the team. Was that all this was, just a warm-up? Buddy would have given a dollar to know.

The schoolboys stood around the field and watched the practice. Carrots's appearance had been like an electric shock. But the sight of Carrots pitching to Buddy Jones produced even a greater sensation. Hushed, eager voices asked Neale what it meant. Neale laughed.

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"Can't Carrots pitch a few balls without causing a riot?" he asked.

"But is he going to pitch for us, Neale? Is Buddy going to let him?"

"Buddy?" the captain demanded sharply. "What has Buddy to do with it?" Then his tone changed. "Run along," he said with forced good nature. "I can't stand here all afternoon and answer questions."

Carrots worked for fifteen minutes. After that he put on his coat and went to the outfield to catch fungoes. Some of the boys edged over to Buddy.

"Carrots going to pitch for us?" one asked.

Buddy turned quickly. "Did Neale say so?"

"Neale won't say anything."

Buddy smiled. His doubt vanished. He thought he knew why Neale had kept his mouth closed. Neale did not like to admit defeat.

Tonight it was Poole who walked home with the catcher.

"What did Neale say about Carrots?" the president of the A. A. asked.

Buddy told him. "It *was* only a warm-up," he added.

"Was it?" Poole said thoughtfully. "You

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haven't changed your mind about things, have you, Buddy?"

"I guess not," Buddy said indignantly.

By the end of a week Carrots had ceased to be an object of extraordinary interest. Then the team moved itself to the village field, and a dozen boys were dropped. The nine began to take shape.

Yost was on first base, Neale was on second, Hill was on third and McCarter was the shortstop. Carlson, Linquist and Pilgrim made up the outfield. Two boys, Ahrens and Kearney, had tried their hands at pitching, but had failed. Arthur Stone continued to be the school's only hurler.

"Is Neale going to rely on one solitary pitcher?" Wally asked curiously.

"What else can he do?" Buddy asked.

"He can use Carrots." Wally's glance was sharp.

Buddy laughed. Carrots no longer bothered him. Carrots did not help run the nine as he had helped run the football team. He didn't even say beans about Arthur's drop. Whenever he came to the village green, he took his warm-up and then retired to the outfield. He acted like a boy who was an absolute outsider and who knew it.

"All right," said Wally; "laugh. But keep your eyes open."

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Two days later Buddy's confidence received a jolt. Instead of going to the outfield after his warm-up, Carrots strolled over to the infield. A boy had been batting grounders from the plate. Now he stepped aside. Carrots took the ball and stepped to the mound. Suddenly he turned and threw to first. Yost clutched the ball and tagged at an imaginary runner.

"Yah!" Neale called. "Fast work. Everybody look alive."

Buddy drew a deep breath.

For fifteen minutes Carrots kept throwing to bases. Then, as carelessly as he had started, he stopped and made his way to the outfield.

"Come on, Art," Neale called. "Take a turn."

Arthur Stone went to the mound.

"You, too, Buddy," the captain ordered. "Get behind the plate. Signal him what base to throw to. Do a little throwing of your own. All right, everybody."

Buddy took position. Neale, watching him intently, gave a quick frown of annoyance.

The practice went to pieces. Buddy's signals were listless and slow. All the fire and pepper disappeared.

"Enough of that," Neale called angrily. He

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walked to the plate. "What's the matter with you today?" he demanded.

"Nothing," said Buddy.

"You act like a dead one."

"I'm all right."

Neale's eyes narrowed. "I was talking to Carrots," he said slowly. "He thinks you can handle him fine."

"I can handle Art better," said Buddy.

Neale mumbled something under his breath and walked away.

After the practice Wally was waiting. "See what happened today?" he asked.

Buddy nodded.

"Why should our infielders get practice taking Carrots's throws?" Wally went on. "Is Neale playing foxy again?"

Buddy didn't know. It seemed to him that everything had been turned upside down. Until today Carrots had not done a thing to awaken suspicion. But today—— Ah, that was it. Today!

"Carrots hasn't the signals," Buddy said weakly, trying to find something on which he could pin hope.

"The what?" Wally demanded.

"The signals. When he stood on the mound

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Yost and the others had to be ready any moment he'd throw. When Art was there I signaled, and everybody knew there was going to be a throw and where the ball was going."

Wally scratched his chin. "You mean he'd have the signals if Neale was going to use him?"

"Yes. Suppose he got throwing to bases in a game without the baseman knowing that a throw was coming? That sounds reasonable, doesn't it, Wally?"

"Chowder!" said Wally. "I guess we were getting excited about nothing."

"I guess so," said Buddy. He felt that a great weight had been taken from his mind. And he felt, too, that some great change was working in Wally. Wally didn't shrug his shoulders any more when ringers were mentioned.

The opening game with Bloomfield High School was now but a week off. The A. A. bought flags for the foul lines and one new base bag. Up to this time the players had been practicing in their street clothing. Now a strange array of uniforms began to appear. The A. A. had never been wealthy enough to outfit the nine. Each player dug up whatever he could and wore that. Buddy's uniform was one that had belonged to Bob. It was faded,

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and patched at the knees, and a size or so too large, but nevertheless Buddy felt as happy as a clam. Nor did he see anything queer in the fact that no two uniforms were the same.

Twice Carrots had sessions of practice with the basemen, but each time in that same haphazard way of throwing without notice. Many times the ball got past the players. But Neale did not seem to care, nor did Carrots, and Buddy laughed away what was left of his fears. And so came the day before the Bloomfield game.

Carrots was working with the huckster's wagon and did not appear. Art pitched easily for twenty minutes. When he finished he looked at Buddy anxiously.

"Bloomfield won't do much with you," said the catcher. "Your drop's working fine."

The pitcher smiled and buttoned his sweater. "Wonder why Neale didn't come over," he said. "A captain ought to want to know how a pitcher is the day before a game."

"Neale's busy with the fielders," Buddy answered. Nevertheless, the same question had been bothering him. Why had Neale stayed away?

"I'm going home," Arthur called. "Eu—hoo, Neale."

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"All right." Neale waved a careless hand.

Buddy went down to his place behind the plate and did a little throwing to bases. After that grounders were hit to the infielders. Presently this slackened. Buddy took off his mitt and walked away. Neale came running after him.

"You're not going, are you?" the captain asked.

Buddy said he was.

"Wait a while, won't you?" Neale coaxed. "Carrots told me he'd be here at five o'clock. He wants a little workout this evening."

Buddy waited. It seemed to him that Neale was showing a lot of interest in Carrots after having displayed so little concern about Arthur Stone.

After a time Carrots appeared. He threw away a cigarette and called for the ball. Buddy threw to him. He began to pitch.

There was no question that Carrots knew his business. His fast ball came in with a zip, his slow ball was a perfect teaser, and his curves had snap and crackle. Buddy sighed. Mackerel! if Arthur Stone could only pitch like that.

And then Buddy noticed a curious thing. Neale was at Carrots's elbow watching every bend and break and twist of the ball. A broad pleased smile was on his face. Once Buddy heard him speak:

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"Try that in again, Carrots."

Carrots tried the in, a beautiful whisker-trimmer.

"That will get them," Neale chuckled. "Buddy holds them well, doesn't he?"

What Carrots said was lost. After the warm-up Buddy put his mitt under his arm and walked away. Once he looked back at the field and saw Carrots and Neale talking earnestly.

"What does that mean?" he muttered uncomfortably.

When he came in sight of his home Poole was leaning against the gate. The president of the A. A. came toward him with eager steps.

"Was Carrots out today?" he demanded.

"He got there late," Buddy answered.

"And?"

"Neale asked me to wait around and let him warm up."

"Did Neale watch how he pitched—you know what I mean, hang around him and all that?"

"That's all Neale did," said Buddy. He felt that some great event was just around the corner.

"Oh, but we've been blind," Poole cried. "Neale's been planning to use Carrots right along."

"But the Irontown pledge——" Buddy stammered.

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"What does Neale care for the Irontown pledge? We're up against a fight now, Buddy."

But Buddy did not want to believe that the baseball captain had played false. He reached for his last ray of hope.

"Carrots hasn't the signals," he said, "and without signals——"

"Signals?" Poole cried bitterly. "Don't talk to me about signals. Carrots has had them all the time. He made them up. Do you hear that? The nine is using *his* signals."

Buddy did not ask how Poole knew. In fact, he was too stunned to ask anything. No wonder Neale had not bothered to look at Arthur Stone. What fools they had been! Wally Hamilton was right. Neale was not one to give up easily.

For half an hour they stood at the gate talking. They did not know what to do. And at last Bob came home from his work at the mill and Buddy went in to supper.

"First game tomorrow, eh?" Bob asked as he washed.

"First game," said Buddy.

Bob gave him a sharp look. There was a hardness to Buddy's chin, and a squareness, and just a faint glimpse of the dawning man. Bob's mouth

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broke into a satisfied grin. He did not ask what the trouble was; he did not care. What he did know was that the boy, instead of whining, was preparing to fight.

And fight was the one thing that Buddy was ready to do. He felt that the school's honor was threatened. Playing Carrots, after signing that pledge, would be as dishonest, he thought, as stealing examination papers or picking a pocket.

But how to fight? Ah! that was the question. It tortured his thoughts after supper; it prodded him when he went to bed. And when he opened heavy eyes in the morning the question was still there, unsolved.

He waited around all morning, but Poole did not appear. After dinner he donned his uniform. With a heavy heart he started for the field.

Carrots was there—in uniform. Neale hurried up with a grin.

"Hello, Bud. Bloomfield'll be here in a moment. She's dressing down at the school."

Buddy glanced at Carrots.

"Knock out fungoes for a while, will you?" Neale asked hastily.

Buddy batted the ball to the outfielders. Presently Bloomfield appeared, two of her boys carry-

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ing a canvas bat bag. After that there was more or less confusion of practice. At length Arthur Stone touched Buddy's arm.

"Warm up," he said.

His voice sounded shaky. Buddy gave him a quick look. The pitcher nodded over his shoulder. "What's Carrots doing here?"

"I don't know," Buddy muttered. He reached down for his mitt. When he paced off his distance and swung around, ready to take the ball, Carrots, in supreme unconcern, was standing alongside Arthur Stone.

Buddy's fingers twitched. He dropped the first ball. Then he got control of himself. What could he do? What could he do?

The pitching ended. Arthur's work had been miserable. Buddy walked off to one side and stared at the ground. He was conscious of the excited hum running through the Fairview High School boys. Oh, why wouldn't they play fair and go out in a body and tell Neale that it wouldn't do?

"Play ball!" cried a voice.

Buddy looked up. Bloomfield was waiting. One of her boys was swinging a bat ready to go to the plate. Some of Fairview's fielders were already at

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their stations. But Neale and Carrots, with their backs turned, were arguing in whispers and holding up the game.

Suddenly the baseball captain turned around. Buddy's heart gave a leap. Neale came toward him with a very, very forced air of unconcern.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Ready," said Buddy, and waited.

Neale seemed to find it hard to speak. As though to gain time he waved a hand toward the spectators. A boy came running toward him with a score-board.

"Well," said Neale, "who—who ought we to pitch today, Bud?"

"Who?" Buddy was playing for time, too.

"Yes."

Buddy steadied his voice. "How many school pitchers have we?" he asked, and wondered what would happen now.

A flush spread across Neale's face. He lost his careless, friendly air. His eyes hardened. The scorer, sensing trouble, backed away. And then——

"Good afternoon, boys," said a pleasant voice. "Arranging the batting order?"

Buddy looked up. Mr. Minor, the principal, was standing near them.

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Neale seemed to lose his starch. "Yes, sir," he answered meekly.

"You seem to be undecided, Neale."

"Y—yes, sir," said the captain.

From the spectators came impatient shouts. "Wake up there, Fairview! What's the matter? Play ball!"

The boy with the score-book plucked at Neale's sleeve. "Who'll pitch?" he asked.

The captain hesitated a moment.

"Stone," Buddy said boldly.

"Stone," said Neale sourly, and glared at Buddy, and walked away.

CHAPTER VI

BUDDY TAKES A STAND

THE game started. The puzzled spectators, who had expected to see Carrots go to the mound, saw him instead stalk down toward first base and stand there scowling. It was Arthur Stone who went out to pitch; and Buddy, at the plate, adjusted his catcher's mitt with trembling hands.

"Gee!" whispered a voice. "Somebody's spilled the beans."

Nobody looking at Neale could doubt that something had gone wrong. The captain nursed a smoldering wrath. When Art prepared to pitch the first ball, Yost, the first-baseman, and McCarter, the shortstop, called to him encouragingly. But Neale said not a word.

Arthur had made a guess at what had happened. He was nervous and upset.

"Take your time," Buddy called softly.

Arthur walked the first two batters. Then, in

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response to Buddy's persistent pleading, he settled down. The next boy, trying to sacrifice, popped to Yost. After that came a strikeout.

"Yah!" Buddy cried. "That's pitching. That's the ticket, Art."

The next batter hit a fly to left field that Pilgrim caught. The side was out.

Fairview straggled in. There were no benches on the village field, and the team at bat could only stand around. Buddy took position behind the spectators near the plate. Arthur joined him.

"Did Neale want to use Carrots?" the pitcher whispered.

Buddy nodded.

Carrots, standing near first base, was receiving much attention. Neale and Carlson stood on either side of him and talked angrily. Most of the players joined them. But Pilgrim, with a careless glance, passed the gathering and walked over to Buddy and Arthur.

"Nice work," he told the pitcher.

Hill, Linguist and McCarter, for Fairview, went out in order. Arthur walked toward the diamond. Pilgrim squeezed Buddy's arm.

"Good boy," he said, and scampered away.

Buddy felt a surge of new courage. Pilgrim

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was one of those who had voted not to send names to Irontown, yet he was now opposed to Carrots in the box. All at once the fight did not seem so hopeless.

The game was a ding-dong struggle. Fairview should have won easily; but Arthur was too much upset to do consistent work and Bloomfield was presented with opportunity after opportunity. Yet, for all that, Fairview managed to keep in the lead, and when Hill threw out the last Bloomfield boy, the spectators gave sighs of relief. Fairview had won 9-8.

Bloomfield was anxious to catch the five o'clock stage. Her players raced for the high school dressing room. And as soon as they were gone Carrots hunched his shoulders and came toward Buddy threateningly.

By this time Neale had mastered his anger. He knew that a fight on the field would make all kinds of trouble.

"Cut that out, Carrots," he called.

Carrots paid no attention.

Buddy felt a wave of fright. The huckster boy, bigger and stronger, would be able to handle him as though he were a baby. However, he did not run. If Carrots wanted to fight with him the clash

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would come sometime, and he might as well stay now and have it over with.

And then, while his heart beat as though it would burst, he felt somebody on his left. He looked around and saw Wally—Wally with his cap pushed back, and his coat buttoned, and a new twist to his careless mouth.

"I wouldn't, Carrots, if I were you," he said.

Carrots stopped short. A look of surprise crossed his face. While he hesitated Arthur Stone stepped to the other side of Buddy. Next the throng of gathering boys parted to let a new-comer through. Pilgrim halted with a hand on Wally's shoulder.

This was more than Carrots had bargained for.

"Gee!" he said. "Got your gang with you, haven't you?"

Neale took him by the arm. "Oh, come on, Carrots. It won't do you any good to lick him."

"It certainly won't," Wally said quietly.

Neale was afraid that a chance taunt might make Carrots throw caution to the winds. He might have saved himself this worry. Carrots had a streak of prudence. The odds were too great and he was anxious to back out. So, when Neale kept pulling on his arm, he allowed himself to be slowly led

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away, but every few minutes he turned as though he wanted to come back.

The excited spectators drifted from the field. Buddy looked around at his friends.

"I—I'd have been in for a licking if you fellows hadn't stuck to me," he said.

Pilgrim smiled. "I guess Carrots won't bother you again. He won't want to run up against the four of us. I'm going your way, Art. Coming?"

The pitcher and the outfielder walked off together. Buddy and Wally turned toward home.

"I suppose," said Wally, "I suppose you're wondering why I did that? Well, I've changed my mind."

"About fair play and——" Buddy began eagerly.

"About ringers," Wally said bluntly. "I've been watching Neale. He's been scheming and plotting and moving in the dark. When the A. A. considered sending out a list of students Neale fought in the open and I was with him. But when he got scheming—— You don't have to plot in the dark for what's right."

"Oh!" cried Buddy in delight. "Poole ought to hear you now."

"Poole has heard me," said Wally. "I told him this morning."

BUDDY TAKES A STAND

The Bloomfield game had been played on a Saturday. Before school opened again Buddy had a whole day in which to think. He should have been delighted that Carrots had been kept out of the line-up. Instead, the more he thought things over, the more dissatisfied he became.

For it had dawned on him that the fight had not been settled. The real issue was still there and some day it would have to be met. Neale had not surrendered. Neale had merely put off the final moment of decision.

Try as he would, Buddy could not imagine what he would have done had the captain insisted upon Carrots. He was not vain enough to think that he had been responsible for Arthur going to the mound. Of course, he had said "Stone!" when the score-boy had asked who would pitch, but he had felt bold because Mr. Minor was right at his elbow. Had the principal not been there Neale would surely not have given in. He would surely have said Carrots. And then—— That was the question that Buddy could not answer.

He wondered, too, just why Mr. Minor had appeared at that particular moment. Was the principal quietly taking a hand in the game? Maybe Poole had spoken to Mr. Minor.

CAPTAIN FAIR-AND-SQUARE

But Poole, when Buddy asked him Monday morning, shook his head.

"This is something for the fellows to settle," he said. "I wouldn't take it to Mr. Minor. It's their honor that's at stake."

Nevertheless, Buddy suspected that the principal's appearance had not been entirely an accident.

Before school was out that day Buddy was made to feel that the students were again condemning him. The boys thought that he should have kept his hands off. Neale was the captain, and if a captain couldn't play whom he liked what was the use of having a captain? In all the school discussion the Irontown pledge was treated as though it did not exist.

Buddy suspected that he would have a bad time on the field that afternoon. Instead, Neale met him with a smile.

"No use scrapping," said the captain. "You have your ideas and I have mine."

"But the Irontown pledge——" Buddy began.

Neale gave him a playful push. "You're not going to get me into an argument. You—you're not sore at Carrots, are you?"

Buddy shook his head slowly. Why should he be sore? The school was at fault, not Carrots.

BUDDY TAKES A STAND

"I was afraid," Neale said, "that you wouldn't want to let him warm——"

"Oh, I'll catch him," Buddy said quickly. In truth, he would rather have Carrots throwing baseball into his mitt than aiming punches at his head.

One thing, however, puzzled him. Why was Neale so friendly? He could understand Carlson. Carlson scowled at him, and held aloof. But Neale, after Saturday's rumpus, met him with a smile and with honeyed words. Was Neale turning foxy again, as Wally would say? Was he again working in the dark and scheming?

"Well," said Buddy grimly, "if he thinks he can soft soap me and get me to change my mind he has another guess coming. I'm against ringers now and all the time."

Carrots did not appear until next afternoon. He came on the field while Arthur was warming-up, and Neale promptly ran to meet him. A few minutes later Carrots passed Buddy.

"Hello," he said gruffly.

"Hello, Carrots," Buddy answered. The huckster boy, after a moment of indecision, ranged himself alongside Arthur. In the most matter-of-fact way Buddy tossed him the ball.

But neither then nor later did Carrots show any

CAPTAIN FAIR-AND-SQUARE

signs of extreme friendliness. It was as though finding a boy who was willing to catch him he took advantage of his opportunity—and that was all.

The second game was with Lackawanna High School. Buddy thought that there might be another clash; but Neale calmly announced Arthur Stone as the pitcher. This time Arthur was in better shape. As a result Fairview won by a score of 5-2.

Buddy left the field in high spirits. It was a good sign, he thought, when Neale did not even mention Carrots. But when he spoke to Poole, the president of the A. A. shook his head.

"Lackawanna had a weak team," Poole told him. "Neale would be foolish to fight without cause."

"Without cause?" Buddy asked.

"Certainly. He knew he could win from Lackawanna with Arthur—anyway, he thought so. What was the use of talking about Carrots when Carrots wasn't needed?"

"Oh!" said Buddy. He stared ahead thoughtfully. "We play Brunswick High School next. She's not weak."

"And we play the first Irontown game after that," said Poole.

Buddy's face clouded.

BUDDY TAKES A STAND

Following the Lackawanna game, a subtle change made itself felt. Carrots continued to come regularly to the field, but now he no longer pitched to Buddy. He had his fun catching fungoes in the outfield, and sometimes he took a glove and fooled around with the infielders, but not once did he come over and take position with Arthur. And Ahrens, who had failed as a pitcher, came back and began practicing with the baseman.

"Hello!" said Buddy. "What are you out for?"

"I don't know," Ahrens said truthfully. "Neale asked me to report and here I am."

Buddy could feel that there was something wrong. He thought that Carrots grinned at him with an air of triumph; and once, when Neale gave him a smile, he was sure that the smile was mocking. Not for a moment, though, could he put even a suspicious finger on anything out of the way.

Nor could even the astute Wally discover anything wrong. And yet, for all that, the sinister atmosphere of the practice remained.

Fairview traveled to Brunswick for the third game. Carrots was not with the nine when the stage pulled out, and Buddy's fears lightened.

"Feel fit for a tussle?" he whispered to Art.

CAFTAIN FAIR-AND-SQUARE

The pitcher nodded. He, too, seemed to be lighter of heart because of Carrots's absence.

However, he needed more than lightness of heart today, for Brunswick had on her batting clothes. In the first inning Arthur was hit for three earned runs. Brunswick, in lofty ambition, had provided a bench for the visitors. When Fairview came in from the field, Neale dropped down alongside Buddy.

"See where we are now without a relief pitcher?" he demanded.

Buddy made no reply.

When the game was over, the score read Brunswick, 11; Fairview, 3. Neale did not seem to be at all downcast. In fact, he rather looked as though somebody had presented him with a pot of gold.

Wally Hamilton had gone to the game. He sat next to Buddy on the ride home.

"Neale's not sorry we lost," he said. "Why should he be? It's one of the early games; it doesn't count for much. Now he can go back and say, 'See what happens when you can't change pitchers?'"

Buddy dropped his glove. When he picked it up his face was serious.

BUDDY TAKES A STAND

"Do you think he'll do that, Wally?"

"Just watch him," said Wally.

In fact, Neale began his campaign long before the stage coach reached Fairview. He told every boy aboard that the nine ought to have two pitchers, and almost every boy began to think about the other pitcher the nine could have.

"Of course," Neale added with fine diplomacy, "Art's all right. He won his first two games nicely. But every pitcher gets batted now and then. Isn't that so, Art?"

Arthur nodded.

Neale sighed. "Well," he said, "the damage is done."

Almost all the boys looked at Buddy, and he flushed painfully.

"Didn't I tell you?" Wally whispered. "Watch what happens now."

When Buddy returned to school next day he found that he was in greater disfavor than ever. The school was sure that, had Carrots been along, defeat could have been averted. And who was responsible for Carrots not being along? Buddy Jones.

That afternoon a sheet of paper was mysteriously tacked to the bulletin board. It read:

CAPTAIN FAIR-AND-SQUARE

Drake and Jones played a fine game for Brunswick High School.

Buddy, when he read it, shut his lips hard. That day on the field he thought that Neale's smile was more mocking than ever. He had no heart for his work, and he did not notice that Ahrens was practicing steadily at second base.

"Come to life, Bud," Neale called. "What's the matter? Tired?"

Buddy said he was.

"All right; give me your glove." The captain came to the plate. "I'll throw to bases for awhile."

Buddy surrendered the mitt. The thought came to him in a vague way as he sat on the grass and watched, that Neale was trying very hard to make the throws go straight and true.

After a while, when the captain surrendered the mitt, Buddy went home. There was something his mother wanted him to buy at the general store, and directly supper was over he departed on his errand. There was plenty of light left, and he wondered if some of the more enthusiastic boys were still practicing on the village field.

He walked down Main street past the post office. He came to the bowling alley. But he did not walk

BUDDY TAKES A STAND

past, for two sounds had come to his ears—the plunk of a ball into a glove and a voice calling, “That’s the stuff, Carrots.”

“Neale’s voice,” Buddy whispered, and stopped.

He did not like to play the sneak, but there was something funny about all this. The bowling alley adjoined a vacant lot, and from the rear of the building ran a fence. Whatever was happening, Buddy thought, was taking place behind the shelter of that fence.

Suddenly he left the road and stepped into the lot. He was going to see what this was all about.

As he approached the fence the plunk of the ball became more distinct. He found a knot-hole and applied one eye. His breath came in a little gasp.

For Neale himself was catching Carrots O’Toole—not in a careless way, but as though his life depended on his efforts. All at once Buddy remembered how anxious Neale had been to get his throws to bases right.

He took his eye away from the knot-hole and went back to the road. It was all as plain as the nose on a person’s face.

“He’s going to use Carrots,” Buddy muttered. “If I say no he’ll drop me from the nine. Then he’ll catch and Ahrens will play second base.

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That's why he ordered Ahrens out. I might have known something was up."

Buddy had the helpless feeling of a boy who, having made a good fight, nevertheless finds himself whipped. He made his purchase and walked home. For a while he sat on the porch. Bob suggested a walk down Main street for some ice cream. Buddy, however, had no heart for cream. He said good-night and went up to his room. But he did not go to bed. He sat by the window and stared out at the dark trees, and the shadowy road, and the feeble flare of the gas lamp at the corner.

There could be no putting off now. The question had to be met. He couldn't duck nor dodge even if he wanted to.

In the past he had had a hazy idea that, when the final moment of decision came, he would quit rather than play with a ringer. But now that the time for him to take a definite stand was approaching, he began to have his doubts. He told himself weakly that he could accomplish no good. If he quit Neale would catch, and Carrots would play anyway. In truth, he was looking for excuses. He did not want to give up baseball. Oh, why couldn't Neale play fair?

BUDDY TAKES A STAND

Next day he told Poole what he had seen. The president of the A. A. puckered his eyes.

"We'll have to face it," he said quietly. He looked at Buddy with eyes that asked, "What are you going to do?" And Buddy, with a shrinking of spirit, turned his own eyes away.

"I'm willing to fight if it will do any good," he told himself miserably, "but it won't do any good. What's the use of my quitting the team if it won't make any difference?"

His conscience, though, refused to be stilled by any such logic. A voice kept whispering in his ear, "You signed the Irontown agreement. You pledged yourself."

To Buddy the practice that afternoon was a nightmare. Neale and Carrots kept grinning at each other as though they shared some joyous secret. He was not sorry when the work was over.

"You're losing your pep," Neale told him.

"I'll be all right," he faltered, and hated himself for the humble words.

After that he kept away from Wally and he kept away from Poole. He did not want them asking him questions. And so, at last, came the day of the Irontown game. Drake, he knew, would be with them. Drake! He shook his head.

CAPTAIN FAIR-AND-SQUARE

As he donned his uniform after dinner the thought came to him that perhaps it was for the last time. He felt frightened. The last time? Why, he'd be lost if he couldn't play baseball. It would be agony to stand around and watch the other fellows in the game.

He walked to the field. Carrots was there in uniform, not pitching, but sitting idly on the grass.

Buddy glanced along the base lines where the spectators were already beginning to gather. Some of the boys were looking at him and some were looking at Carrots. In many of the eyes that were turned his way he read a frank antagonism. His heart sank. For the moment his courage was dead. What was the use of fighting against such odds?

Pilgrim passed him. "Neale's going to use Carrots," he said in a low voice. "It's all over the field."

Buddy nodded. He knew. Once more his eyes swept the spectators. They were all for using Carrots and winning the game. If he gave up and went over to them it would be only one more added to their ranks, only one more——

He took a slow, deep breath. A new thought had come to him. It would not be one more added to

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them. It would be one less to stand by Poole and fight for fair play.

Several minutes passed but he did not move. He saw things clearer now. It made no difference whether or not he could stop Carrots from playing. If he believed in keeping ringers out he must stand by his guns. His duty was to stay with his ideals. There could be no compromise, no surrender. Right was right and wrong was wrong. There could be no middle ground.

The spectators stirred restlessly. Buddy glanced up and saw Neale coming toward him.

"I'm going to use Carrots," the captain announced. His voice held a challenge.

Buddy's eyes lingered on the field. He saw the bases, the home plate, the green stretch of outfield grass. No more baseball; no more happy tingle as he banged out a hit; no more glorious cloud of dust as the runner slid for the plate; no more——

Buddy sighed. His eyes came back to the boy in front of him.

"I'm sorry, Neale," he said. "You'll have to find another catcher."

CHAPTER VII

FAIRVIEW PAYS THE PRICE

BUDDY pushed his way through the spectators. Every boy guessed that he had quit rather than play with Carrots. All at once a change seemed to come over the crowd. Boys who had looked at him with antagonism now turned their eyes away or hung their heads. A shrewd man, watching, would have said that Buddy had shamed them. But Buddy, keenly stirred up by what had happened, scarcely saw the eyes that were turned away.

Back of the crowd he met Poole. The president of the A. A. smiled quietly.

"I knew you'd be with us to a finish," he said.

"I—I almost flunked," Buddy confessed.

"Almost don't count," said Poole. "Wait until tomorrow. Wait until the fellows get a chance to think things over. Oh, Neale'll find he's not such a clever chap as he thinks."

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They stood together and watched. Ahrens ran out with the infielders and began to practice at second base. Neale warmed up Carrots. A wide grin was on the captain's face, and as he threw his cap on the ground to give Carrots a target he winked at the nearest boys. Neale was quite pleased with himself.

Presently the Irontown nine, in uniform, approached from the direction of the high school where they had dressed. Drake was in the lead. He saw Buddy and came over and shook hands warmly.

"All ready to give us a battle?" he laughed.

"All ready," said Buddy and introduced Poole. Drake and Poole shook hands, and Buddy was struck by how much alike they looked—not in features, but in a sort of look-the-world-straight-in-the-eye way.

"You fellows have been going good," Poole said. "It ought to be a fine game." He turned to Buddy. "Playing today?"

Buddy shook his head.

"No?" Drake's glance was sharp. "I thought you caught the other three games."

"I did," Buddy answered, "but Neale's behind the bat today."

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Drake frowned. He looked out at the field. His eyes rested on Carrots.

"That's O'Toole, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes," said Poole.

"Huh! He pitched against us last year, and I understand the year before that as well. Isn't he ever going to graduate?"

Neither Buddy nor Poole answered. After a moment of silence Drake said he had to hustle along. He went out on the field.

"Hello, there," called Neale.

"Hello," said Drake, but did not stop.

Buddy looked at Poole. "Think he suspects anything?" he whispered.

"Drake's no fool," the president of the A. A. answered. "Neale'll wake up."

The Irontown infield began to practice. Drake was on third base. It was a treat to watch his clean, sure work. By and by he left the bag and was replaced by a substitute. Poole saw him talking to a white-whiskered man.

The president of the A. A. nudged Buddy. "Who's that man with Drake?"

"Mr. Swayze," said Buddy. "He's the Irontown principal. Look, Poole. They both have their eyes on Carrots."

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"Drake's no fool," was the answer.

When the umpire announced the Fairview battery as O'Toole and Neale there was a ragged cheer from the spectators. The game began. Carrots wound up and shot the ball into Neale's glove.

"Strike!" said the umpire.

"It will be a slaughter," said Poole. "They won't touch Carrots. Look at that speed."

Poole was right. Irontown went through nine innings without a run, and only three of her players were left on the bases. All Neale had to do was to stand behind the plate and catch the strikes and the foul-tips.

The Irontown boys knew from the third inning that, barring accidents, they did not have a chance. Nevertheless, they played baseball every moment. Defeat did not make them nasty. They did not try to rattle Carrots. They were clean sportsmen from the time the first ball was pitched until their last player was thrown out. Then they quietly gathered their bats and their sweaters and left the field.

"They didn't cheer us," said Poole. He laughed softly.

Drake waited to see that all his players were safely on their way. He and Mr. Swayze walked

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across the diamond. The Irontown principal was speaking and Drake was listening intently. They came to where Buddy and Poole were standing and halted.

"Can you give us a few minutes, Jones?" Drake asked.

Buddy stepped toward them. "Certainly."

"Please walk with us toward the high school," Mr. Swayze said. In another moment Poole was left standing alone.

"Neale," he said quietly, "you're up against it."

Buddy was sure that he knew what was coming. He felt a deep burning shame. Irontown was so clean, and Fairview was so—— No, no. Not Fairview. Neale and Carlson and some of the others. The school was not to blame.

"Jones," said Mr. Swayze, "you were a delegate to the last Irontown conference, were you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"You signed that resolution, did you not—the resolution pledging each school to play only bona-fide students?"

"Yes, sir." Buddy's voice was weak. What did they think of him?

"Your team played a ringer today," Mr. Swayze said gravely. "Fairview broke its pledge."

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Buddy said nothing. He could feel his cheeks burning. He wanted to rush to the defense of his school. He wanted to explain that things were not as black as they looked—that Poole and Wally and Pilgrim and others wanted to play fair. But how could he say all that? Carrots had been played, the pledge had been broken, and that's all there was to it.

Mr. Swayze's voice broke in on his thoughts. "We knew before the start of the game that O'Toole was not a student. We came here in good faith to play a game, and we lived up to our obligation. But I must tell you, Jones, that we are through with Fairview. You have another game with Lackawanna, have you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Bloomfield?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Brunswick High School?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am sorry," said Mr. Swayze, "but I am afraid none of those games will be played. We intend to get in touch with every high school in the county. Every school that has Fairview on her list will be asked to cancel. You understand our position, Jones?"

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"Yes, sir," said Buddy.

They had reached the high school. From inside came the uproar that is always associated with a baseball team getting dressed to go home. Suddenly Buddy felt Drake's hand on his shoulder.

"Jones," Drake said, "we ought not to be talking to you this way, but you're the fellow who signed the pledge. We know you're all right. We know you want to play clean. And we know—— Shall I tell him, Mr. Swayze?"

"Certainly," said the man.

"We know," said Drake, "that you quit today rather than catch O'Toole. It was common talk among the spectators, and our players could not help overhearing. You're all right, Jones, but your school is bad."

And then Buddy found his voice. "The school's all right," he said passionately. "It's some of the fellows who are wrong."

He stood on the sidewalk and watched Mr. Swayze and Drake enter the building. Irontown would leave town a beaten nine. Fairview had her victory, but was in disgrace. Every school in the county would be told of her shame.

Slowly he walked home. He thought that Poole would be waiting on the stoop. Instead, the presi-

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dent of the A. A. was waiting several blocks from the house.

"Did they know about Carrots?" he asked eagerly.

Buddy nodded. "They knew."

"What did they say?"

"They're going to cancel their other game——"

"I thought they'd do that."

"And they're going to see that every high school in the county drops us."

"Whew!" Poole gave a thoughtful whistle. "I wonder what Neale will say to that."

By Monday the news of what Irontown threatened had spread among the boys of the village. The students, that morning, clustered about the high school steps and talked excitedly. When Neale appeared a sudden hush fell.

The captain carried himself with a swagger. He stood on the top step and stared down at the faces turned up to him.

"Bluff," he said confidently; "nothing but bluff. You fellows can worry if you like, but I won't. If you want something to think about, try to find out who told them that Carrots was not a student."

"Who did tell them?" a voice asked curiously.

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"Buddy," Neale answered quickly. "He walked off with Drake after the game. Can you put two and two together? I can."

An angry murmur ran through the students. Wally pushed forward to the bottom step.

"You fellows give me a pain," he cried hotly. "Buddy's been against ringers, but he's been out in the open. When he found Carrots was to play he quit. He didn't sneak."

"He threw down the team," said Neale.

"He didn't." Wally faced the captain. "You threw down the team. You knew about the Iron-town agreement, and you knew that Carrots wasn't a student, and yet——"

"Another reformer," Neale cried in mock horror, and fled into the building. In truth, he did not want to stand and discuss who was responsible for anything that might happen. If Irontown should make trouble—— Of course, he didn't expect it, but then if there was trouble he didn't want anybody saying that it was Neale who had put Carrots into the game.

The students greeted the captain's flight with laughter. He had been so confident that their courage had returned. Cancel all the games? Bosh! The other high schools had sense. Iron-

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town was sore because she had been licked. It was bluff—nothing but bluff.

“Why,” said one boy, “she wouldn’t even cheer us after the game. We cheered *her*.”

“You poor bonehead,” Wally said in pity. “You ought to have your brain examined.”

“I guess I’m no more a bonehead than you,” the boy answered indignantly. “She didn’t cheer us.”

Wally’s tilt with Neale had one good result. The boys, instead of swallowing the captain’s charge that Buddy had played informer, allowed themselves to doubt. Many of them, of course, thought him all kinds of a ninny, but there could be no doubt that he had been fair and square.

Buddy had expected to find the students agitated and frightened. Instead, when he reached school that morning, they were apparently not at all impressed with Irontown’s threat.

“Neale’s fooling them,” Wally said in disgust. “He told them it’s all fake.”

“And they believe it?” Buddy demanded in surprise.

Wally waved his hands and laughed.

During the morning Buddy heard of Neale’s charge. At noon he wanted to face the captain. Poole took him by the arm and led him away.

CAPTAIN FAIR-AND-SQUARE

"Nobody believes it," Poole said. "Neale'll have enough to think about in a few days."

"He told them it was all bluff."

"I know. How many games are left?"

Buddy thought a moment. "Thirteen."

"A hard luck number," said Poole, and stared ahead with puckered eyes.

By three o'clock the entire school seemed to have forgotten Irontown. The baseball players, laughing and chatting, went off to the village field for afternoon practice. Buddy put his books under his arm and trudged home. So far as he was concerned baseball was over. He swallowed a lump in his throat and tried to convince himself that he did not care—much.

The vegetable garden in back of the house had by this time been planted. He spent the afternoon weeding. But, oh, what a long afternoon it was! He wondered if Arthur was pitching to Neale and if everything was running along the same as usual. He was just boy enough to hope that he had been missed.

Shadows began to lengthen across the garden rows. The front gate clicked. Presently two boys came around the corner of the house, Pilgrim and Arthur Stone.

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"Neale sent us," said Pilgrim.

Buddy dropped the hoe and went forward to meet his visitors. "Neale?" he asked in wonderment.

Arthur nodded. "He wants to know if you've quit the nine for good."

Buddy felt that there must be some mistake. Then he saw Pilgrim's mouth twisting into a smile.

"Neale's a pretty wise duck," the outfielder observed. "He tried to warm up Art this afternoon. It was awful. They didn't fit together. It didn't take Neale long to make up his mind that he needed you pretty badly."

"I couldn't do a thing with the ball," Art confessed. "He had me up in the air."

But still Buddy was puzzled. What did this mean? If he wouldn't catch Carrots, and if Neale couldn't catch Art, what then?

"Is Carrots going to be dropped?" he asked.

"Not on your life," said Pilgrim. "Neale has a different plan than that. He says you needn't catch Carrots if you feel that way. Nice of him, isn't it?"

"How about Art?" Buddy asked.

"Why, whenever he wants to use Art you play that day and go behind the bat."

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Buddy saw light at last. So that was it! Slowly he shook his head.

"I told him you wouldn't swallow anything like that," Pilgrim remarked quietly.

"I can't," Buddy said. "I don't believe in ringers, and what Neale wants me to do would be just like closing my eyes to what was happening. He wants me to help him so he can use Carrots. If I won't play with Carrots, I have no right to fix things so Carrots can play. Isn't that right?"

"Right," Pilgrim answered instantly.

"I don't know how I'm going to pitch a game with Neale catching," Arthur said miserably. "He gets on my nerves."

"There may not be many games to pitch," said Buddy.

Pilgrim looked up quickly. "Do you think many of the teams will cancel?"

"Don't you?" Buddy asked.

Pilgrim shook his head. "I don't know. You were at the Irontown meeting. You met fellows from the other schools. You talked to Drake the other day. What do *you* think?"

"I think Neale can stop worrying about pitchers," Buddy answered.

Pilgrim smiled. "I'll tell him that," he said.

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That evening he reported to the captain. Neale bit his lips nervously while he listened.

"Did he look as though he might change his mind?" he asked.

"He did not," Pilgrim answered emphatically. "And he said something else, too."

"What's that?"

"He said you could stop worrying about pitchers."

"Who's worrying?"

"Well, he said you could stop, because when Iron-town——"

"He's a fool," the captain cried angrily. "He can't scare me with that kind of talk."

Nevertheless, Neale was upset. The fact that he could not get the best out of Arthur had jarred him. Buddy's refusal to come back was another upset. Added to these distressing incidents, he had learned that Poole had made the bold statement that almost every game would be canceled. And now here was Buddy publicly saying the same thing to members of the nine.

Neale knew that it is sometimes easy to start a panic. Let two or three boys in a school begin to predict trouble and other boys can always be found to accept their viewpoint. Neale wanted no such

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dose mixed for him. If the school began to wear a long face it would not be long before the nine would be wearing a long face, too. Disheartened athletes are usually whipped before they start.

Neale really believed that Irontown's threat was made of thin air. Get the other schools to drop games? The idea seemed wild. Nevertheless, Poole and Buddy were predicting dire things, and unless he wanted trouble it was up to him to jump in and stop this game right at the start.

Secure in the belief that nothing would come of Irontown's threat, he decided on a bold stroke. He would challenge the croakers. He would let the whole school see just what he thought about things.

That night he worked in his room with pen and ink and paper. Next morning he carried the result of his labors to school. Halting in front of the bulletin board, he unrolled a sign and began to tack it in place. Students gathered.

"What's that, Neale?"

"Let's look, can't you?"

"Something from Irontown, Neale?"

The captain stepped away from the board. "There's what it is," he said. "Have a look."

They saw this sign:

FAIRVIEW PAYS THE PRICE

LET THE CROAKERS CROAK

THE FOLLOWING GAMES WILL POSITIVELY BE
PLAYED

HASBROUCK HIGH SCHOOL AT HASBROUCK
• GARRISON HIGH SCHOOL AT GARRISON
GATES HIGH SCHOOL AT HOME
POMPTON HIGH SCHOOL AT HOME
BLOOMFIELD HIGH SCHOOL AT BLOOMFIELD
BRUNSWICK HIGH SCHOOL AT BRUNSWICK
LACKAWANNA HIGH SCHOOL AT HOME
SADDLE RIVER HIGH SCHOOL AT HOME
HASBROUCK HIGH SCHOOL AT HOME
GARRISON HIGH SCHOOL AT HOME
POMPTON HIGH SCHOOL AT POMPTON
GATES HIGH SCHOOL AT GATES
IRONTOWN HIGH SCHOOL AT IRONTOWN

"Irontown?" asked a voice.

Neale laughed. "Oh, I just stuck that on as a joke. I guess she'll cancel all right if only to make her bluff good."

"And—and all the other games will be played?" a second voice asked.

"Not a doubt of it," said Neale. "We'll go off tomorrow to play Hasbrouck."

When Poole saw the sign he shook his head but made no comment. Nor would Buddy talk. Neale grinned. Mackerel! he had silenced both of them in one shot. This was better luck than he expected.

At noon, when school was dismissed, there was a letter for Neale stuck in the corner of the bulletin

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board. He tore the seal, glanced at it a moment and laughed.

"Irontown cancels," he said gayly. "I told you she'd have to do that, didn't I?"

"What does she say?" an eager voice asked.

Neale flushed and put the letter in his pocket. "She cancels," he said shortly, and turned away. Poole smiled. He thought that he wouldn't want to read that letter either, if he had been responsible for Carrots. He was of the opinion that Drake had said some pretty hot things.

Drake had. Several blocks from school Neale showed the letter to Carlson:

"W. D. NEALE,

"Fairview High School.

"DEAR SIR:

"In view of the fact that Fairview H. S. broke its pledge of honor and played a ringer against Irontown H. S. last Saturday, we deem it our duty to cancel the game remaining between the two schools. I am also advised to inform you that Irontown will not meet Fairview on the gridiron next fall.

"I lost a notebook last Saturday. Will you please inquire if it was found?

"CHARLES A. DRAKE,

"Baseball Captain, Irontown H. S."

Carlson gave a low whistle. "They mean it, don't they?"

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Neale nodded.

"I wonder," Carlson went on slowly, "if those other schools will cancel——"

"Oh, shut up!" cried Neale. "You're as bad as Poole."

Carlson was silent. Presently he asked:

"Going to inquire about Drake's note-book?"

"Catch me doing him any favors," Neale growled. "Let him hunt his own book. I hope he never finds it."

When the baseball captain got back to school he found that somebody had run a lead pencil through the Irontown game. Somebody else had scrawled on the board: *One out, batter up.* Neale held his temper.

"All aboard for Hasbrouck tomorrow," he called.

He tried to be cheery and light-hearted, but he could see that some of the boys were worried. It had been all right to say that Irontown would cancel; but now that she had done just that, the thing began to have a different look. Neale wondered what the school would say if it knew that there would be no football game next fall, and just how long it would take the news to leak.

And, because he was keeping something hidden,

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his actions became forced, and artificial, and strained. He affected a cheeriness that was too cheery. Boys began to ask each other, "What's the matter with Neale?"

That afternoon, in his nervousness, he tried to make the practice move faster than usual, with the result that there were many slip-ups. Ahrens fumbled repeatedly, and Neale flayed him with loud, angry words. For the moment the captain had forgotten his cheery rôle.

"Play the bag yourself if you don't like my game," Ahrens grumbled. "You asked me to come out."

Neale checked himself. If Ahrens quit he would surely be in a hole, for he had no other second-baseman. Of course, he could play the position, but then who would catch?

"Can't you take a little ragging?" he asked in a quieter tone. "I'm all jumpy today. Get back there and play ball."

"All right," said Ahrens, "but don't come at me so hard. I'm doing the best I can."

Neale took a glove and began to warm up his pitchers. Carrots was out today, and Carrots's curves broke beautifully. But a grammar school team could have killed everything that Arthur Stone

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had. Even his drop was conspicuous by its absence.

"Can't you get anything on the ball?" Neale asked in exasperation.

Arthur took off his glove. "Oh, what's the use? I can't pitch to you. I might as well quit."

Neale broke into a cold sweat. Everything was going wrong today. He walked down to Arthur and pleaded earnestly.

"We're not used to each other," he said. "Take the afternoon off. I want to use you tomorrow against Hasbrouck. Mackerel! Art, if you quit, where am I? Carrots goes out with the huckster wagon tomorrow. I've got to have you. You're not going to quit, are you?"

In the end Arthur promised to stick with the team. Neale wiped his forehead.

"That's all for today," he told Carrots. "A little more of this and I'd be nutty."

Carrots rolled a cigarette. "Buddy wouldn't come back, eh?"

"No. He said making it possible for you to play would be the same as playing with you. Isn't he a sweet pickle?"

Carrots blew a puff of smoke. He thought the whole matter of little consequence. If he wanted to play with a team and a team wanted him, why

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couldn't he play? What harm was done? Clean athletics? Rats!

Nevertheless, in his rough-and-tumble experience with life, he had learned to have an honest respect for courage.

"He's got his nerve with him," he said.

"He's crazy," Neale cried wrathfully.

"Sure," said Carrots; "he's crazy twice. But when he says a thing he means it. I'm going down and shoot a game of pool."

Next day Neale had regained his poise. During the morning he spoke confidently of beating Hasbrouck. At noon he gathered the baseball players around him.

"Mr. Minor will excuse us at two o'clock," he said. "Bring your uniforms to school. We catch the half-past two stage."

He hurried home to dinner. Twenty minutes later he started back for classes. He met Carrots and the huckster wagon on the way and was delayed a bit. It was almost one o'clock when he approached the school.

Instantly he knew that something was wrong. The students were packed into the main hall. On the steps he saw the suit cases of the baseball players. Carlson hurried toward him.

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"There's a letter from Hasbrouck," the football captain said.

Neale's heart missed a beat. Could it be——
But no. That was impossible.

He pushed into the crowd of boys. They opened a lane for him. The letter was stuck into the frame of the bulletin board. Neale's eyes stared at the closing sentences.

". . . and so, in view of Irontown's protest, we have decided to cancel both our games with Fairview."

"What is it, Neale?" called a voice. "Is the game off?"

Neale's face was white. "Hasbrouck's as crazy as Irontown," he said thickly. "She's called off today's game and——"

"How about the game later in the season?" a voice demanded.

Neale swallowed. "That—that's called off, too."

Poole touched Buddy's arm. "Come away," he said. His voice sounded as though he was sorry for the captain.

The crowd in the hall broke up and drifted into different class rooms. There wasn't much talk. The boys were staggered.

Neale never knew how he got through classes

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that afternoon. There was no baseball practice. The players took their uniforms and went home.

Next morning there were cancellations from Hasbrouck, Garrison, Pompton and Gates. In the afternoon came cancellations from Bloomfield and Brunswick. Sober-faced boys ran their fingers down the boasting list of games that Neale had posted.

"Lackawanna and Saddle River," they said. "We still have them."

Neale went about his affairs with trembling lips. He called no baseball practice, and nobody asked him if the nine should go to the village field.

Friday morning there was a letter for him stuck in the bulletin board and postmarked Saddle River. He did not take it down. By noon it had a companion. This one was marked Lackawanna. He shoved them in his pocket and stalked out. Nobody asked him what the letters contained. Halfway home he stopped and hurled them, unopened, into a vacant lot.

The school nine did not have a game left.

CHAPTER VIII

POOLE TAKES COMMAND

NEALE was frightened. All along he had jeered that Irontown was bluffing. He had not let himself believe that any great trouble could come because Carrots had played with the school team. And now that the blow had fallen he did not know which way to turn or what to do.

No captain, he thought, had ever faced a proposition like this. He had a nine, but the nine had no games to play. It was an outcast, shunned and avoided. It might just as well break up and disband.

For a few days, Neale knew, the school would do nothing but talk. Out of that talk, however, would come some sort of sentiment. It was of sentiment that Neale was afraid. Would the boys lay all the blame on his shoulders? He had another year at high school and next spring he wanted to be captain again. Would this kill his chances?

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The moral end of the question did not appeal to him. To his mind, the unexpected had happened. He was the victim of circumstances. Next year, he was sure, this streak of righteousness would die out. Next year the howl against ringers would cease and things would go on as they had in the past. He thought that it was just his luck to get tripped at this time. He was totally blind to the fact that a clean spirit had arisen and was slowly crushing him and his kind.

One moment he would be sorry that he had not been careful. He should have been prudent. He should have played Carrots against some school other than Irontown. The next moment he would be angry at Buddy Jones, blaming the catcher for all his troubles. And so, torn by conflicting emotions, he did his Friday afternoon chores. When he finished there was still time for a trip to the village field before supper. He did not go. He did not have the heart to face the boys he might find there.

That night he hunted up Carrots and Carlson. He found them loitering with a group of boys near the post office. He whistled, and they came toward him at once.

"Anything new?" Carlson asked eagerly.

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Neale shook his head. "What was that gang talking about?"

"The same old thing—what's the nine going to do." Carlson was silent a moment. "What *is* the nine going to do?"

Neale didn't know. The three boys turned into one of the darker village streets and walked along slowly.

"I thought this was all bluff," Carrots said.

"It is all bluff," Neale cried angrily. "It's a flash in the pan. You know how those things work. Somebody yells his head off about something and everybody goes crazy. That lasts a little while and then it's all forgotten. But while the uproar is on it goes bad with the fellow who stubs his toe—and I happened to stub mine. That's all."

"That's plenty," Carrots observed.

"It's mighty funny bluffing," said Carlson slowly.

Neale turned to him. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that if this was something that was going to blow over it wouldn't be so unanimous. Every school has dropped us. And Irontown won't play football with us next fall, and maybe the other schools——"

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"It will all blow over by that time, I tell you," Neale insisted desperately.

But Carlson shook his head. "You're in Dutch," he said, "and the quicker you find it out the better off you'll be."

This time Neale stopped short. Carrots and Carlson stopped, too. Neale was breathing hard.

"I suppose," he said, "you'll be going over to Poole and Buddy now."

"What else can we do?" Carlson demanded.

Neale had not expected such an answer. For a moment he was stunned.

"I'll never go over," he burst out at last. "It's my nine and I'll run it my way——"

"How?" Carlson demanded bluntly.

"I'll get games."

"Where?"

"I'll get them some place. I'll—I'll get them with town teams, shop teams, factory teams. What about that?"

"It won't do," Carlson said.

"No?" Neale bristled. "Why not?"

"Because ours is a school team. I'm not saying anything against town teams and shop teams. But we expect to play school teams. It's what we've always been doing. That little glass case in Mr.

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Minor's office is full of trophies we won from school teams. If we play other games, every place we go they'll be saying we're the nine that can't get a high school to play us. The fellows won't stand for that."

"They'll have to," said Neale. "I guess they'll play if I get the games."

"I won't," said Carlson. "I'm no better than you or Carrots. I played Carrots on the eleven and I schemed with you to play him on the nine. But I know when I'm licked. I'm through. School teams, yes. I'll stick with you to a finish. But I'm not going around playing town teams. If you know where you're wise you'll have a talk with Poole and Buddy and see what can be done."

Neale almost choked. Hot words sputtered to his lips; but when he tried to utter them he found that Carlson was walking away. And at that Neale's heart sank. He felt like a general who, in time of war, has been deserted by his staff.

"You—you'll stick by me, won't you, Carrots?" he stammered.

"Sure," said Carrots, and rolled a cigarette. "No use getting excited."

It seemed to the huckster boy that a mountain was being made out of a mole hill. What difference did

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it make who a team played so long as it played? A game was a game, wasn't it?

But, for all that, Carrots sensed that school boys might not see things as he saw them. School teams did mighty funny stunts. There was that matter of cheering, for instance. Why should a team cheer the fellows who licked them? Why should either team cheer? To Carrots it had always seemed mildly amusing. He viewed it as a silly custom. Maybe school teams had a still sillier prejudice against playing town teams.

"Say," he said to Neale, struck by a sudden idea, "there's other high schools. Can't you play them?"

"I hadn't thought of that," Neale said slowly.

He thought about it now. There were other high schools, four to be exact—Waddington, Forrest Hills, Spring Valley and Maywood. They were all in the eastern part of the county, and they had never been booked because travel in that direction was slow and cumbersome.

Neale's mind worked rapidly. If he could book games in that quarter his face would be saved. The four schools were small, smaller than Fairview. It was probable that they could not afford to travel to him. Well, he'd travel to them. He brushed aside the thought that it would be an unequal

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arrangement in that his nine would have to travel without the compensation of return engagements. All he saw was four possible games and the chance they gave him of saving his reputation.

"Gee! Carrots," he said, "I'm glad you thought of that."

"Going after them?" Carrots asked.

"You bet I am. First thing tomorrow morning—No; I'll do it tonight. I'll go home and write the letters now. I'll show Poole and Buddy whether they can make a monkey of me. I suppose they're holding their sides and laughing and thinking they've got it all their own way."

"Not Buddy," said Carrots. "He's got nerve. His kind don't do that."

"You can't tell me," said Neale. "I know."

But the captain didn't know. Instead of being joyful, Buddy was miserable. And as for Poole—well, Poole was once more searching through the constitution of the athletic association for power to go over a captain's head.

Monday Neale came to school with something of his old swagger.

"Practice this afternoon," he said. "Everybody on time."

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Instantly he was surrounded by boys. Eager voices poured questions into his ears.

"Are the games back on the schedule, Neale?"

"Has Irontown backed down?"

"Have you fixed things up?"

"There's nothing to fix up," Neale said sharply.

"I have sent off letters for new games."

"Oh!" The boy who said the word backed away.

"What teams?" another voice asked.

Neale told them.

"They're only little schools," somebody complained.

Neale flushed. "They're schools, aren't they?" he demanded. "I guess they can play baseball." He saw that there was very little enthusiasm for his plan and he got away quickly. "Practice today," he called back. "Everybody out early."

Carlson followed him to his class-room. "What did you tell them that for?" the football captain asked.

"Why did I tell them what?" Neale's voice was cold. He hadn't forgotten Friday night.

"That you had written for games. Now, if you don't get them, it will be another black eye."

Neale dropped his coldness. "But I had to tell them something," he pleaded. "How could I get

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the nine out if they thought there were no games ahead?"

Carlson did not expect many of the baseball players to go to practice. However, he made no comment. He moved a book back and forth across the desk.

"If you'd have a talk with Poole and Buddy," he said, "maybe something could be done——"

"I'm running this," said Neale.

Only five boys came to the practice that day—Carlson, Pilgrim, Ahrens, Arthur Stone and Linqvist. Yost, McCarter and Hill, three of the infielders, did not put in an appearance. Neale, though worried, kept a grip on himself. He moved Ahrens to third, he played second, and two boys were drafted from the spectators and put at first base and shortstop.

"How about me?" Arthur asked.

"I can't catch you today," Neale confessed. "Bat to the infielders, will you? And see if you can find somebody to bat to the outfield.

There could be no doubt that that day's practice was a frost. Next day it was no better. Yost and McCarter appeared, but Linqvist and Ahrens stayed away. Arthur got ten minutes' practice pitching to Neale and then batted fungoes again. There was

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no system. There were no results. Even those who came out played careless, indifferent ball.

By Thursday the situation was critical. Neale longed for news from the four schools. If he could come back and say that he had a game or two, he felt that everything would be all right. He had given his home address. He did not want any more letters coming to the school to be stuck in the frame of the bulletin board. He had had enough of that.

When he reached home for dinner that day two letters awaited him. They were from Waddington and from Forrest Hills. Both schools had their schedules closed and could not add another game. Neale dropped the letters and groaned.

He said nothing when he returned to school. He would tell the baseball players when they assembled at the village field. The fewer boys he had to face the easier, he thought, it would be to break the news.

But when he reached the field that afternoon it seemed that most of the school was there. Some sixth sense had told the students that something was about to happen. Neale took Carrots by the arm and walked him off to one side.

"Nothing doing," he said.

"With the other schools?" Carrots asked.

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Neale nodded. For the moment his face was hopeless. He was at the end of his resources. He did not know what to do. He looked about the field and the sight made him even bluer. Instead of practicing, the baseball players were standing around idly and gossiping with the spectators.

"How about town teams?" Carrots asked. "I can get two games."

"With whom?"

"There's a brass foundry at Irontown that has a team, and a pencil factory at Lackawanna. They'll play us."

"How do you know?"

"I spoke to fellows I met who work there. How about it?"

Neale considered. There was a chance—just a chance. He was desperate. Something had to be done.

"All right," he said. "Come over here."

He called the players. They formed around him. The students pressed in close. Neale saw Poole and Buddy on the outskirts of the crowd.

"Fellows," he said nervously, "it looks as though we can't get those games. Waddington and Forrest Hills say they cannot add to their schedules."

"Disband the nine," said a voice.

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"Hold on!" Neale raised his hand. "I can get games if you fellows want them."

"Where?" Pilgrim asked.

"With shop teams. There's a brass factory at Irontown—Irontown, isn't it, Carrots?"

"Irontown," said Carrots. "And a pencil factory at Lackawanna. They'll give us games."

The crowd was silent. Poole pushed his way forward until he stood in front of Neale.

"Just a minute," he said. "The A. A. pays the expenses of the team when it travels, but if the nine plays shop teams the A. A. won't put up any money. Each fellow who goes with the nine will have to pay his own way."

"He won't," Neale cried angrily.

"He will," said Poole. "The nine is supposed to play school teams. Almost every shop team has professional players. Besides, we're only boys and those shop teams have men. The A. A. won't put up a nickel."

Neale tried to argue, but the words would not come. Here was something that he had not expected.

"That's what I call getting pretty fresh," said Carrots.

Poole faced the students. "How many of you

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fellows paid your weekly dues thinking that the nine would play shop teams? Raise your hands."

Not a hand was raised.

"How many of you paid your dues thinking our teams would play school teams?"

Every hand went up—even Carlson's.

"You're a fine lot of Mary Anns," said Carrots.

"Well, I'll pay my own way."

"It isn't a question of money," said Pilgrim. "I see what Poole means."

"So do I," said Carrots. "He's trying to make himself a smart Aleck. A team is a team and——"

Poole faced around. "Look here, Carrots, are you a Fairview student?"

"No."

"Then what right have you to mix up in this? This is a school matter."

"Don't I pitch for the school nine?" Carrots demanded indignantly.

"Not any more," Poole said distinctly.

Neale swallowed a lump in his throat and said nothing. Carrots glared, but made no threatening advances. For the same four boys who had faced him down once before were again in front of him—Arthur Stone, Wally, Pilgrim and Buddy. Only this time they stood beside Poole.

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Carrots sniffed. "Any time I have something to say," he announced, "I'll say it. How about those games? Do we play them?"

For a moment there was silence. Then a voice spoke:

"We don't." Carlson had cut away from his old friends.

But afterwards, when Poole tried to give him a quiet word of commendation, he shook his head.

"I'm not sure you fellows are right about ringers," he said with some of his old sullen manner. "I don't see much harm in it. I played Carrots on the eleven. But if all the schools are against it, it's got to go. And as for playing shop teams, that would be a mistake. We're a school nine."

"You'll be with us," Poole said with a smile. "You'll see that ringers are wrong."

"Maybe," said Carlson.

The gathering on the village field broke up. The players drifted away without bothering to practice. Neale and Carrots went off together. Usually three or four boys tagged after a Fairview captain. To-day, though, none seemed to care to follow Neale.

He had one hope left—one faint, dying hope. He had not yet heard from Maywood or from Spring Valley.

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Their letters awaited him at home. Maywood wrote that illness to two of her star players had forced her to disband her nine.

"Just my luck," Neale sighed.

Spring Valley's letter sent the red into his cheeks:

"In view of certain things that have happened this season, and to which it should not be necessary to call your attention, Spring Valley cannot consent to meet Fairview."

Neale let the letter drop. His last hope was gone. He was beaten.

However, by morning he was again scheming. He would find a way out. He would. He had to.

While he squirmed and twisted and tried to think of some new plan, baseball fell upon sorry days at the Fairview High School. He made no effort to keep the nine together. For one thing, he doubted whether the players would obey him were he to give an order. On paper he was still the captain of the nine, but there was no nine.

Neale was used to the glory that comes to a captain. The new rôle in which he found himself was far from pleasant. Once he surprised a small grammar school boy making faces behind his back. He twisted the boy's ears, but the insult rankled.

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Only a month before that same small boy had been glad of the chance to carry his glove.

By degrees he lost his ardor. He still kept turning his baseball affairs in his mind, but his zest was gone. Everything seemed so hopeless. He couldn't book a game with a school in the county, and the fellows wouldn't play any other nines.

He tried, several times, to make guarded charges that Buddy had laid the foundation for all this trouble. When he saw how his words were received, he speedily changed the conversation to something else.

For Buddy, at the moment, was a school hero. He had protested against Carrots. He had quit the team rather than break his pledge. Buddy was a good scout! Buddy knew how many beans made four! The school quite forgot that it had not been one whit backward in thinking this same Buddy Jones a dub, and that it had stood behind the captain in wanting Carrots on the team.

While the school despondency was at its height, Buddy awoke one morning with a restless desire to do something. The sky was blue; the air was soft; all outdoors called. After breakfast he started for school, paused at the door, and finally came back for his glove and a ball.

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"No use moping this way," he muttered, "just because we have no nine."

He carried the ball and glove to school. It was the first time a baseball had been seen near the building since the nine stopped practice. He hurried into his class room, dropped his books, and hurried out.

"O Art!" he called. He threw to the pitcher. "Let me have a couple."

Ten minutes later, when the boys crowded in for assembly, Arthur was flushed and happy.

"Gosh!" he whispered to Buddy. "I surely needed that. I feel better."

"So do I," said Buddy.

That afternoon half a dozen baseballs appeared. Within twenty-four hours the school was at play again.

Now that he had a taste of baseball, Buddy was hungry for more. He longed for the joy of combat. He thirsted for the spirited rivalry of a game. Finally he spoke to Poole.

"It's this way," he said. "We're suffering because we played a ringer, but it can't last forever."

"You mean it will blow over?" Poole demanded.

"No, I don't mean that. This fight on ringers is to a finish. But Fairview won't always be black-

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listed. Some day we'll be playing those schools again. Won't we?"

Poole nodded. "I suppose so."

"Well, where are our players coming from? We can't develop players this way. Catching fungoes and stopping grounders isn't practice. You must put a fellow where he has to think for himself and act quickly, and you can't do that unless you have him in a game."

"Not shop teams," Poole said sharply.

"No—not shop teams. But if we could organize a team in each class——"

"Mackerel!" cried Poole. "Why hadn't somebody thought of that?"

By supper time they had decided that it could be done. Buddy trotted home with a happy, ravenous appetite. Poole found an old, battered silver cup in his attic and spent the evening polishing it into a semblance of brightness. The cup, he decided, could go to the class winning the most games.

Next morning Poole brought news of the plan. Instantly groups of boys began to form teams. There was much good-natured quarreling for places. Neale appeared while the excitement was at its height.

"What's up?" he asked.

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"Baseball between class teams," Wally told him.
"Poole has put up a cup."

Neale's eyes lighted with interest. "Whose plan is it?"

"Buddy's," Wally told him.

His eyes clouded. He walked into the school. One of the boys from his class hurried after him.

"Neale! Help us fix a team, will you?"

"Class teams!" Neale said scornfully. "That isn't baseball. Where are you going to get pitchers and catchers?"

However, by noon he had changed his mind. He was keen enough to see that the school welcomed these class games as a thirsty man would welcome water. He resolved to trail along. He was in no position where he could afford to turn up his nose and try to dictate. The school was going to play baseball, and as baseball captain he should have had a lot to say. But, for the present, he had lost caste. He had no standing.

He resolved, if possible, to win some credit from this new turn of affairs. That afternoon, while he should have been struggling with Latin, he secretly worked out a schedule. At three o'clock he showed his labors to the students.

"Eight games for each class," he said.

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"How about batteries?" a dubious voice asked. "Some of the classes have neither pitcher nor catcher."

"I've attended to that," Neale said lightly. "Art and Buddy will form one battery and Ahrens and I will form another. Each battery will work four games for each class."

"Then each class has to furnish only seven players for the fielding positions."

"That's the answer," said Neale.

"Gosh!" said the voice. "That fixes everything nicely, doesn't it?"

Neale smiled. He thought he had handled the battery question rather cleverly. All at once the old feelings of leadership returned. He turned to the boys.

"You fellows better get all the practice you can," he said.

There was a rush for the village field. Boys who would never have thought of turning out for the school nine, decided that they could play ball well enough to make a class team. As a result the field bubbled with activity. It was like old times to see the players in action again. Buddy, as he caught Arthur's pitching, shook his head sadly. Of course, this was all right; but wasn't it a pity the students

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were not practicing to meet Bloomfield or Lackawanna or even Irontown instead of preparing merely to give each other battle?

Neale assumed charge of the field. Late in the afternoon Carrots appeared. He drew the captain aside.

"Games back on the schedule?" he asked eagerly.

"No." Neale shook his head. "Just class teams. Poole has put up a cup."

"Well," Carrots said judiciously, "that's better than nothing. What class do I play with?"

Neale flushed. "N—no class, Carrots. We have two batteries and they'll work for all the classes."

Carrots hunched his shoulders. "Whose idea was that?"

"Why, you see, Carrots——"

"Whose idea, eh? Yours?"

"I couldn't help it," Neale pleaded. "It's just among the classes, Carrots, and after this mess with Irontown the fellows wouldn't stand——"

"You fellows give me a pain," Carrots said in disgust. "You're all afraid of Buddy Jones." He stalked away.

Next day, however, he returned. For a while he stood watching. Presently Neale approached a bit timidly.

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"Look here, Carrots," he began, "I can't help it if you're barred from this."

Carrots rolled a cigarette. "Well, maybe you can't. Suppose I stick around and help you run things?"

"Will you?" Neale asked eagerly. Here was a chance for peace.

By the time it grew too dark to play the captain was somewhat sorry he had invited Carrots to take part. The huckster boy had waded into the practice like a tyrant. He could play the game better than any of these boys and he was not a bit backward about letting them know it. By the time the practice stopped there were whisperings of rebellion. For that matter, Carrots wasn't the hero he used to be.

Neale and Carlson had not seen much of each other of late. Tonight, though, the football captain waited for his old friend.

"Carrots going to do this often?" he demanded.

"He's helping me," Neale said stiffly.

"You'll find the fellows quitting even the class teams if he keeps bossing," Carlson told him.

Neale lost his stiffness. "You know how it is," he pleaded. "Carrots had always helped us. I can't tell him to run along and forget it."

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"Tell him to tone it down," said Carlson. "I won't let him boss me that way."

When next Carrots came to the field Neale hurried forward to meet him.

"Not so hard on them, Carrots," he said with a grin. "They're not in your class, you know. Give them a chance."

"What's the matter?" Carrots demanded. "Have they been babying?"

"Oh, no. Nobody's been kicking. You know how it is, though. Some of them are just kids. Go easy."

Carrots's idea of going easy, however, proved to be almost as bad as his tyranny. He became jauntily sarcastic. Poole, who was out for a place on the junior class team, frowned. What right had this outsider to interfere and cause trouble? The first day of practice had been full of fun, but the have-a-good-time spirit was leaving.

Carrots saw the frown. "Hello!" he said. "What's biting you?"

"Nothing," said Poole. "And nothing's going to bite me."

"Gee!" Carrots mocked. "I'm not so popular as I used to be."

In truth, a double change had come. Not only

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had Carrots fallen from his pedestal in the minds of the students, but in his mind they had fallen as well. When the cry had been, "Hurrah, Carrots!" he had been good-naturedly tolerant of what he called "the school kids." Now that there were no more hurrahs, he began to sneer at all their boyish habits and customs. Besides, he was hurt by the way the school had edged away from him.

"They were glad enough to have me pitch," he complained to Neale.

"Sure!" said the captain soothingly. "They'd be glad to have you back tomorrow if we had games."

But Carrots wrinkled his freckled nose and shook his head. He was thinking about Poole and Buddy Jones.

The first game was played on a Wednesday. Ahrens and Neale worked for the seniors, and Arthur and Buddy labored for the sophomores. Carrots did not reach the field until the seventh inning. The sophomores, thanks to Arthur's pitching, led by a score of 6-1.

"Me for the under dog," said Carrots.

And so, when Ahrens went out to pitch the eighth inning, the huckster boy followed.

"All right, kid," he said. "I'll tell you what to pitch. I'll stand here right behind you."

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"Neale's signaling me what to pitch," Ahrens stammered.

"Forget it. When he signals for the right ball I'll tell you."

Up to this point it had been a good game—not as vitally interesting as a game between two schools, but nevertheless good. Now, however, the interest seemed to go flat. The whole thing became a farce. Ahrens, pitching balls he didn't want to pitch but pitching them because Carrots said so, went utterly and completely to smash.

"Gee!" Carrots said in disgust. "Who told you you were a pitcher?"

He walked off the diamond and threw himself down on the grass. The damage had been done. The game dragged to a finish. The players were glad to quit.

Buddy walked home with Poole. "Juniors and freshmen Saturday," he said.

Poole, third-baseman of the junior team, showed no enthusiasm.

Thursday's practice was rather dead. Friday Arthur had to spade flower beds and did not come to the field. There was nothing for Buddy to do. He sat back and watched Poole at third base.

Poole was not a baseball player. He did not even

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think he was a player. He had caught the spirit of this movement Buddy had started to save baseball at Fairview. Everybody was needed to help the good work along, and so he had turned out for his class team.

Today he missed grounders and dropped thrown balls. He cut a weird, awkward figure. Buddy, watching, did not even smile, for he knew why loyal, quiet Poole was out there.

The huckster's wagon must have quit business early that day, for presently Carrots came to the field. By degrees he edged over toward third base. He saw Poole and his eyes danced. Oh! what a chance to get back.

Poole missed a grounder.

"Get a net," Carrots croaked. "You're fierce."

Poole muffed a fly.

"Oh-ho!" said Carrots. "Who ever heard of trying to catch a ball that way? You don't want a glove; you want a pillow."

Poole dropped a thrown ball that smacked into his hands.

"Mamma's boy," chuckled Carrots. "Hurt your little hands? Throw them underhand, fellows. Let him take them on a bounce."

Poole picked up the ball and faced his tormentor.

POOLE TAKES COMMAND

"What right have you to interfere with high school teams?" he asked.

"What right?" Carrots bristled. "Didn't Neale ask me to help him?"

Poole turned. "Neale!"

The captain had been catching Ahrens. When he saw Poole and Carrots he immediately crossed the diamond on the run.

"What's the trouble?" he asked, trying to smile.

"Carrots is interfering with my work for the class team. Did you invite him out here?"

"I was just kidding him," Carrots explained.

Neale tried to save the situation. "Oh, come, now," he coaxed. "If Carrots wants to give you a little advice be a sport and take it, can't you?"

"I'll show him how to play the bag," Carrots offered airily.

Poole did not lift his voice. "Did you invite him out here, Neale?"

"Well," the captain said uncomfortably, "he knows the games and——"

Poole took off his glove. "I don't think I care for baseball," he said.

He strolled away swinging his glove idly at his side. Buddy followed. Back on the field Neale rallied the players and the practice was resumed.

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"Through for good?" Buddy asked seriously.

"For good," said Poole. "I don't mind a fellow coming out and fooling around with the teams. I'm not stuck up. But Carrots has become an issue. He wants to take a hand in school affairs as his right and Neale is willing that he should. That sort of thing must stop."

"Carrots will try to boss the game tomorrow," Buddy observed.

Poole's mouth hardened. "He'll kill the class games before he's through. Oh, why isn't there something in the A. A. constitution to let us go over the captain's head?"

That's what Buddy thought. Why wasn't there? Presently Poole spoke in a milder tone:

"Neale brought all this trouble by playing Carrots. The nine has no games. What does he do? Nothing. The school must sit back with its hands in its lap and suffer."

"What could we do?" Buddy asked.

Poole shook his head helplessly. "I don't know. I wish we had a different constitution. Then we might straighten things out."

They had walked all the way to Buddy's house. They went in and sat on the stoop. The day was hot and dusty. Buddy walked around to the rear

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and presently reappeared with two glasses and a pitcher of well water.

"Gosh!" said Poole. "Hustle it along. I'm parched."

They drank the water to the last drop. After that they sat in silence busy with their thoughts.

A whistle sounded from up the road. Buddy jumped to his feet.

"Wally Hamilton," he said. "Mackerel! but he's hurrying."

Wally, hot and panting, turned in at the gate. He carried a paper under his arm.

"You fellows see the *Weekly Sentinel*?" he gasped.

They shook their heads.

"It just came to our house in the mail." Wally tried to catch his breath. "They take a slam at us for playing Carrots——"

Poole snatched the paper and spread it out.

"Th—third page," said Wally.

Poole found the story. Buddy, watching, saw his lips become a thin, cold, straight line.

"They've done it now," Poole said.

Buddy edged closer. "Who?"

"Neale and the others. Listen to this." He read the story:

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"According to reports current in high school circles throughout the county, the Fairview High School is to be blacklisted. Three weeks ago Fairview played the Iron-town High School nine and used a pitcher who was not a student. Irontown complained to the other high schools, with the result that every game on Fairview's schedule was canceled.

"For years athletic conditions at Fairview have been notorious. Ringers have been used constantly, and it is said that the boy who pitched against Irontown played on the football team last fall.

"When the Irontown conference was called in the interest of clean athletics, Fairview, to the surprise of many, sent a representative. When the agreement to play only bona-fide students was laid before the conference, this representative signed. At that time it was thought that Fairview was sincere and that she had reformed. However, the game with Irontown showed that Fairview was up to her old tricks.

"The other high schools are resolved to stamp out this form of deceit. As a punishment, no football games will be booked with Fairview for next fall. The school has shown that it cannot be trusted. Now it will be ignored."

Slowly Poole put down the paper. His lips were still thin and hard.

"Nice, isn't it?" he asked. "No football, either."

Buddy's eyes were round with misery. "We won't have a thing," he gasped. "We'll be cut off, and disgraced, and——"

Poole's hands crushed the paper. "We won't,"

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he said passionately. "Neale's got to step aside. I'll call a meeting of the A. A.——"

"But the constitution," Buddy broke in.

"We'll forget the constitution. The whole school is under attack, and the school is bigger than any captain."

"Now—now you're talking," said Wally.

Poole jumped down from the stoop and threw open the gate. Buddy caught his arm.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"To the field," said Poole. "The fellows will still be there." He strode away, and Buddy and Wally, with a look at each other, followed. A wide, quiet smile had come to Wally's face.

"'Dreamer' Poole," he said. "Well, well, well."

Some time later Neale, looking up from the practice at the village field, beheld a strange procession approaching. In the lead was Poole, his tie flying in the wind, carrying a crushed and torn newspaper. Back of him came Buddy and Wally Hamilton plainly hurrying to keep up.

"Hello!" said Neale. "What's this?"

The practice stopped. The players gathered. Carrots threw away the stump of a cigarette.

"Looks like trouble," he said.

Poole stopped in front of the clustered players.

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"I have here," he said, "a copy of the *Weekly Sentinel*. I want to read an article from it."

"Make it short," said Carrots. "You're interfering with the practice."

Poole read the article. By degrees a little whisper ran through the crowd. No football! Neale's face turned red.

"Drake had that printed," he cried. "It's Drake's work."

"It's true," said Poole, "no matter who had it printed. The news will go all through the county that Fairview boys can't be trusted. I'm a Fairview boy. That article takes a slap at me and at every one of us. What are you going to do about it, Neale?"

"Nothing," the captain sputtered. "If Drake wants to——"

"Then I'll do something," Poole said clearly. "I'll call a meeting of the A. A. tomorrow——"

"Tomorrow's Saturday," said Carrots. "Can't hold a meeting on Saturday. The school will be closed."

"The meeting will be held in my barn," Poole retorted. "At three o'clock tomorrow——"

"Baseball game tomorrow," Carrots grinned. He seemed to take a delight in taunting Poole.

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"This is bigger than baseball," Poole said. "I call the game off."

"You can't," Neale cried angrily. "You're going just a little too far. I represent the nine——"

"I represent the school," Poole broke in. "The game is off."

Neale's eyes dropped. All around him he could hear the quick breathing of startled boys. Suddenly he thought he saw a loop-hole.

"This is an athletic matter," he cried triumphantly. "The captain has full power. The constitution of the A. A. says so. You can't go over my head. I say baseball tomorrow."

"Good boy!" said Carrots. "Don't let him bluff you."

"I'm going over your head," said Poole. "They're throwing mud at the school and you don't seem to care. But I care, and I think others care. The class game is off. The A. A. will meet at my barn at three o'clock. Hear that, fellows?"

Heads nodded silently. Neale swallowed hard, but did not argue.

"Nasty little brute, isn't he?" said Carrots.

Poole had started away. Now he swung around and came back.

"This meeting is for high school students," he

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said crisply. "Carrots, you're not a student. Keep out."

"Huh!" said Carrots. "I guess if Neale wants me to go——"

But the captain, with his eyes on the ground, said not a word.

CHAPTER IX

A NEW CAPTAIN

YEARS before, when Fairview had been a farming community, Poole's home had been a farm-house and the barn had sheltered many horses. Now, however, it was used to store those battered odds and ends that had been discarded from the household.

After leaving the field Poole and his friends walked to this barn. The place was littered and dirty. Poole surveyed the floor ruefully.

"We'll have to clean this," he said.

Wally started to take off his coat. "Now?"

"No; tomorrow morning will do. There's bigger game for tonight."

Wally looked at him. "Bigger game?"

"I mean thinking. We've got to think. It's easy enough to call a meeting. The question is, what will the meeting do? Have either of you fellows an idea?"

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They shook their heads.

"Then think," said Poole. "That's what I'm going to do all evening. So long!"

After supper that night Buddy followed his brother out to the porch.

"Bob," he said, "if you do something you're sorry for and ashamed of what—well, what can you do?"

Bob looked at him keenly. "Been up to any tricks?"

"Oh, no," Buddy hastened to say. "I didn't do anything. You see, the school is in trouble——"

"Carrots O'Toole?" Bob asked curiously.

Buddy nodded.

Bob half-closed his eyes and stared across the road. "If I did something I was ashamed of," he said at last, "I'd apologize."

"But this is a school, Bob, not a man."

"Is it? Well——" Bob stretched his arms. "I guess you'll have to figure it out for yourself, Bud."

"I can't," said Buddy. "It's too big for me."

Next morning, when he went to Poole's barn, he did not have the ghost of an idea.

"Neither have I," Poole said. "Neither has Wally. No use moping, though. Let's clean this stuff."

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They found some old brooms, and filled the sprinkling can. The floor was watered and swept. Several trunks, an old lounge and three broken chairs were carried up to the ancient hay loft. After that planks were stretched across wooden horses.

"Gosh!" said Wally, "it's beginning to look swell. What are you going to use for your desk, Poole?"

A barrel, turned upside down, was made to answer. A soap box served as a seat. By the time the noon whistles blew the meeting place was ready.

"If we only knew what we were going to do, I'd feel better," Poole confessed. "Neale won't make any suggestions. He'll sit back and wait to see what happens. And if we stutter and stammer and get nowhere's he'll jump in and take charge of the nine again. Then where will we be?"

"We'll be in the soup," said Wally. "Neale will say, 'Those fellows are all talk. They don't know what they want.'"

"We know what we want," Buddy said gloomily, "but we don't know how to go about it."

He went home to dinner. Afterwards he sat on the porch with his chin in his hands. He wanted to see Fairview square itself with the other schools. He wanted these other schools to realize that Fair-

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view wanted to do what was right. But how, how, how?

Of course, if Fairview was a man instead of a school, it could say, "I'm sorry; I won't do this again." Buddy's eyes took on a far-away look. Why couldn't a school be sorry? Why couldn't a school say it was sorry? Why not?

So engrossed did he become in this thought that he lost track of the passage of time. Suddenly the kitchen clock began to strike. He counted—one, two, three. The hour for the meeting. He bolted down the stoop, and out through the gate, and set off on a run for Poole's barn.

As he turned in at Poole's gate, he saw Carrots leaning against a tree on the other side of the road. He hurried to the barn. Poole was in the chair and the meeting had that moment been called to order. The students were noisily settling themselves for a lively afternoon. Neale, trying to look completely at ease, had a seat near the door.

Buddy found a place beside Pilgrim. The out-fielder leaned closer.

"Carrots outside?" he whispered.

Buddy nodded.

"He made a fuss. Said the meeting would talk about him and that he was going to come in and

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hear it. I guess he changed his mind. Hello! What's Poole going to say?"

The president of the athletic association was on his feet. The barn became hushed.

"Students of Fairview," he said, "I have called you together today to see if something cannot be done to straighten out the athletic situation in which we find ourselves. As you know, we have been blacklisted by every high school in the county. Newspapers are beginning to print stories that shame us. It must stop.

"We all know what has caused the trouble. Let's be honest with ourselves. We broke faith. We signed a pledge to play only students and we played Carrots O'Toole. We didn't do it innocently. We did it knowing we were wrong. And now we are suffering because of our sins. Let's not beat about the bush. Let's admit it. We played dirty ball."

"That's the talk," cried a voice.

"Give it to them, Poole."

Neale jumped up. "Why didn't some of you saints say something against Carrots before I played him?" he demanded angrily. "You wanted him. You know you did. Now that you're found out you're beginning to whine."

The students were silent.

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"The whole school is to blame," Poole said quietly. "not Neale alone. Neale would never have played Carrots if the school had protested. But Neale's wrong when he says we're whining because we've been caught. It may look that way, but you can't always go by looks. I think we're beginning to find out that we were wrong, and if we're sorry at all, it's because we put a stain on our honor."

There was a murmur of approval from the students. Buddy thought that Poole was making a fine, earnest speech. He glanced toward the doorway for Neale, but Neale had dropped back to his seat.

"We must do something," said Poole, "to show that we're through with ringers. We must do something to show that we want to play fair. What action this meeting will take I do not know, but I am ready to hear suggestions."

There was a shuffling of feet and much looking about, but no boy arose to his feet. A minute passed. Neale chuckled. Then, as though accepting this as a challenge, a voice spoke:

"Mr. President."

"Jones has the floor," said Poole.

Neale sat bolt upright.

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"We've done wrong," Buddy said simply. "We've broken faith. When you do wrong the square thing is to come forward and own up, and say you're sorry. Isn't that so?"

The boys had all been planning complicated ways of getting the school out of its difficulty. Here, however, was a solution as simple as A, B, C. Why hadn't they all thought of it?

"Right-o!" called a voice.

"That's the answer," cried another.

Neale left his seat and came forward. Usually the A. A. conducted its meeting with some respect for Cushing's Manual of Parliamentary Law. To-day, however, Cushing and parliamentary law were forgotten.

"I want to get this straight," the captain cried. "You want us to own up that we played a ringer?"

"Didn't we?" Buddy asked.

"Never mind that. You want us to come out in the open and tell everybody we're guilty. Is that it?"

"Yes."

"And you want us to say we're sorry?"

"Yes."

Neale's voice became sarcastic. "Don't you want us to promise it won't happen again?"

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"I do," Buddy answered. "If we're sincere it can't happen again."

Somebody whispered a faint "Good boy!" Neale glared. Suddenly he faced Buddy again.

"How is all this apologizing to be done?" he demanded.

"By letter."

"By letter, eh? And who are we going to send a letter to—your chum Drake?"

"No," said Buddy; "not Drake. Drake has nothing to do with this. We'll send the letter to the Irontown A. A. And we'll send the same letter to every school that signed the Irontown agreement."

Neale could scarcely believe his ears. Have the school make a fool of itself by going around and blubbering, "Please, Mister, we were naughty, but we won't do it again?" Bah! It was babyish. It was like a bunch of children in kindergarten. It wasn't the way up-to-date high school fellows should act. He could almost picture small boys calling after him on the streets and asking him if his mother had allowed him out. Kiddish! Absolutely kiddish!

Then came a new thought.

"Who'll sign this letter?" he demanded.

"Poole representing the students," said Buddy,

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"and the captain of the eleven and the captain of the nine."

"I won't sign it," Neale shouted. "You can't make a sissy of me."

"I'll sign," Carlson said from the rear of the barn.

The meeting had become electric. Poole banged a piece of wood on the barrel head.

"There's nothing to sign," he said. He was the calmest boy in the place. "Buddy has made a motion, but it has not yet been seconded."

Instantly a dozen voices gave the necessary aid.

"If any student desires to speak against the motion——" Poole began.

"I do," said Neale. "I tell you what I've told you all along—this ringer stuff is fake. Do you think we're the only school in the county that played a fellow who wasn't a student? They all do it. Why, at the first Irontown meeting, Drake told us that one fellow had played on two different school teams——"

"After the Irontown pledge was signed?" Buddy asked.

"B—before," Neale admitted. He bit his lips. "Do you think that the Irontown pledge has changed things?"

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"It has," said Buddy, "or we wouldn't be meeting here today. It isn't all bluff. The other schools may have made mistakes in the past, but now they're trying to play clean. So are we—now."

"Now?" Neale laughed. "Now we're just crawling. We're getting down at Drake's knees like a whipped poodle, and we're rolling over and playing dead. I'm against it, I tell you."

He went back to his seat. Buddy faced the students.

"Fellows," he said, "if we're afraid to admit we've done wrong, we deserve to be blacklisted forever." And then he, too, sat down.

"Question!" called a voice. From all parts of the barn the cry arose. "Question! Question! Question!"

Poole lifted his hands. "All in favor of sending a letter such as Buddy has suggested say aye."

"Aye!" thundered a chorus.

"No!" cried Neale—a lone, wrathful voice. He walked to the doorway and looked back at them. "You're a fine lot of boobs!" he said bitterly. "You all ought to be wearing ribbons in your hair. I won't sign such a letter. I quit as captain of the nine. I'm sick of the whole thing."

He disappeared through the doorway. For a

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moment his shadow danced in the outside sunlight. Then that, too, was gone. They heard his footsteps grow fainter and finally cease.

The meeting sat stunned. Gradually the students recovered their wits. Pilgrim jumped to his feet excitedly and ran over to Arthur Stone. He talked a moment and the pitcher became excited, too. They called for Linqvist and Carlson and Ahrens and McMaster. A whisper ran through the meeting that the nine was selecting a new captain.

The conference of baseball players appeared to reach a decision. Pilgrim swung around and faced the chair.

"Mr. President."

"Pilgrim has the floor," said Poole.

"Mr. President, a majority of the nine thinks that the question of a successor to Neale should be left to the school. We feel that at present there is no nine. Anyway, the A. A. is running things, and it might as well pick a captain.

"So far as we know, a freshman has never been captain." There were murmurs of "Buddy!" and Buddy's cheeks turned red. "But," Pilgrim went on, "there's nothing to stop a freshman from being a captain. We've talked it over, six of us, and we think that the captain ought to be a fellow who's

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been in this fight from the start, a fellow who's for clean athletics from start to finish. For that reason we nominate for captain Buddy Jones."

A cheer broke from the benches. Some of the planks were knocked from the wooden horses and fell with a crash. Nobody paid any attention to a little thing like that. The meeting had become a stampede. Nobody seconded the nomination. No vote was taken. They crowded around Buddy and lifted him to one of the planks that still remained in place.

"Some older fellow ought to get it," Buddy pleaded. He thought he must be dreaming. It did not seem possible they had named *him*.

"'Rah for Jones!" they cried.

"I'm only a freshman. I don't know the game like McMaster or——"

"Don't believe him," cried McMaster. "He's trying to duck."

"But I'd just as soon play——"

"Nobody but Jonsey," shouted the students. "Jonsey Jones."

And then, of a sudden, Buddy's eyes took fire. His mouth set. Slowly the romping stopped. The students looked up at him curiously.

"All right," he said. "If you want me, I'll do

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what I can. I'd like Carlson and Poole to come to my house tonight and help write that letter."

"I'll be there," said Carlson.

Poole nodded.

"I'm going to get it off at once," Buddy went on. "I'm going to tell the other schools the whole story. I'm going to get the nine together again—you'll practice for me, won't you, fellows?"

"We will," said Pilgrim.

"Even if there are no games in sight?"

"We'll practice," Pilgrim said again.

Buddy smiled. "I don't want anybody to be disappointed," he said, "but maybe when the other schools see how things stand here, maybe they'll put us back on their schedules."

A joyous yell broke from the students, a yell born of sudden hope. Shrill and ringing it carried out to the road where two boys loitered and listened. They had heard the cheering for Buddy and they knew what it meant.

Neale took Carrots by the arm.

"Come on," he said in disgust. "This is no place for us."

CHAPTER X

A BRIGHTER DAY

NEALE'S body burned with a rankling sourness. The acid of adversity was his. He tasted it in his mouth; he felt it in his bones; it crept into his brain and puckered his thoughts.

What a mess his affairs had become! He was no longer leader. He had been ditched, and a mere freshman was in his place.

An inner voice whispered that it was all his own fault, and that he should have known that this fight for clean athletics had been a sincere fight from the start. Another voice whispered how different things would have been had he accepted the Iron-town agreement. He shook his head angrily. He wanted no reflections like these rising and taunting him.

Neale bore little resentment so far as Poole was concerned. The president of the A. A., as a third-

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year student, was entitled to his opinions. But against Buddy he nursed a savage grudge. Buddy was a freshman, a kid, a little runt of an upstart. He should have known his place. He should have kept his mouth shut. Instead, he had cut the traces and had broken a new trail. And everybody had gone after him with a hurrah. Every—no; not everybody. Not Carrots, and Neale stole a glance at his friend.

He expected to see Carrots's face dark with anger. Instead, the huckster boy was calmly smoking a cigarette. When he caught Neale's gaze he gave a slow grin.

"Well," he asked, "what's the next move? Got it figured out?"

"I'll teach him to mind his own business."

"How?"

But that was something that Neale did not know. Buddy was no longer a colorless freshman. He had become a power in the school.

"If you ask me," Carrots observed wisely, "I'd say you're licked to a finish. The best stunt is to lay low. Then, when all this blows over—it's going to blow over, isn't it?"

"Y—yes," said Neale.

"Is it or isn't it?"

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"Of course it is," Neale answered hastily. "I told you all along it was a fake, didn't I?"

"You don't say it as hard as you used to," Carrots complained.

In truth, Neale did not want to talk about ringers at all. He did not have the courage to say that doubting voices had begun to whisper to him. He was sick and sore of a subject that had harassed him for months and had finally been his undoing.

Had Neale known it, he could still have redeemed himself. Had he gone over to those who wanted only what was good for the school, he would speedily have found himself in favor once more. Instead, he nursed his wounds and went his way alone.

Carrots's air of calmness rasped his nerves. He walked home. After supper he strolled forth and met several of the students. He wanted to know how the A. A. meeting had ended. They told him that the nine was going to resume practice.

"Practice?" Neale's eyes opened. "What for?"

"Buddy thinks some of the schools may re-book games when they find we're——"

Neale gave a shout of scorn. "Yah! He's crawling. I told you."

But his scorn was forced. He was afraid. Sup-

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pose games were booked? He hurried away as soon as he could and hunted up Carrots. He hoped that Carrots would say something to calm his fears. Instead, the huckster boy looked thoughtful.

"Gee!" he said. "If Buddy puts that over it's one fine black eye for you."

"He always was lucky," Neale cried wrathfully.

"He's a scrapper," Carrots said, with a faint tinge of respect.

Neale walked home moodily. He passed Buddy's house. Upstairs a light burned brightly in one of the rooms. He paused and watched. Presently a form was outlined on the window shade. He knew the shape of that head. Carlson!

"Trimmer!" he said, and trudged on, wondering how the boys in that room were getting along.

They were getting along very well. At first Carlson had been flustered and self-conscious, but Poole and Buddy had soon put him at his ease. Now he was as much at home as the others.

Buddy had completed the opening paragraphs of the letter. Carlson leaned forward as he read:

"STUDENTS OF THE COUNTY.

"Comrades: At a meeting held this afternoon the Fairview High School Athletic Association passed the following resolutions:

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"First: To publicly confess that this school has been guilty of playing ringers, and to admit that the punishment now meted out to it is just.

"Second: To make public apology for the wrong that has been done.

"Third: That a letter containing the purport of these resolutions be sent to every high school in the county."

Carlson nodded. "That's the stuff."

"Go on," said Poole. He smiled. "Purport's a fine word."

Buddy's eyes twinkled. After a moment his pen began to toil over the paper. Presently he read again:

"We feel that this is the only honest course for us to take. We have done things that were not fair and square, and we want to make amends. We hope that this letter will be accepted in the spirit in which it is offered."

"Is that all?" Carlson asked in disappointment. Buddy nodded.

"But we don't say anything about it never happening again, or about getting some games--—"

"We can't say that," Poole explained gently. "If we do, it will look as though we're not sincere. It will look as though we're fishing for something."

Carlson gave a slow nod. "I guess you're right. Let's get these letters in shape."

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An hour later the letters were signed, sealed and stamped. Then, filled with a great sense of importance, the three boys escorted the mail to the post office. The place was closed, but Buddy pushed the envelopes through the slot in the door.

Poole sighed. "Gone!" he said. "It's up to Irontown and the other schools now."

"Good luck to them," said Carlson.

They separated and went their several ways. Buddy walked home with his hopes mounting high. Oh! if the nine could only get a few games. He did not want the games just for the sake of playing. He wanted them because they would mean that the school had been forgiven and could once more hold up its head.

Monday the school bulletin board carried a copy of the letter. Mr. Minor, the principal, read it, smiled quietly, and passed into his office. Neale read the letter, too, but Neale did not smile. That line, "*Jones, Capt. of the Nine,*" was like jabbing a knife into his spine.

The school, being in a very penitent mood, approved of the letter. As soon as classes were dismissed for the day there was a rush for the village field. Buddy longed to run off with the others, but prudence bade him hold back. It would be

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better if he took his time and let the impression get abroad that the practice didn't worry him at all.

So he lingered at the school. When at last he approached the village field he saw a sight that made his heart beat faster. The work was going on with plenty of spirit. No stranger, looking at them, would have suspected that here was a nine that did not have a sure game in sight.

Buddy saw Poole and waved a glad hand. The president of the A. A. came toward him at once.

"Neale isn't here," Poole said.

"He may come later," said Buddy.

But the afternoon wore along, and the former captain did not appear. Ahrens played at second base. His fielding was snappy and sure, but his batting was merely a shell of what batting should be. Buddy sighed. If Neale did not come out—— He pushed the thought aside. Time enough to face that problem when he came to it.

He put on a glove and signaled to Arthur Stone. The pitcher grinned happily.

"Like old times, Bud," he called.

That was the spirit that seemed to be over the field. Like old times—like those days before Carrots had played, when there had been plenty of

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games on the schedule and good times ahead. The infielders called cheerily to one another. The outfielders raced after flies with eager feet. And when, one by one, the players came to bat, the wood rang merrily—until Ahrens stepped into the batter's box.

Five times he swung vainly at Arthur Stone's pitching. The sixth time he hit a measly little grounder. He looked back at Buddy and flushed.

"I'm a rotten hitter," he said.

"You'll get your eye," Buddy encouraged. "Art's good today. There aren't many who can hit that kind of pitching."

"The others are hitting it," said Ahrens. He tossed his bat aside and went back to second base.

After the practice Buddy walked home with Poole. The president of the A. A. looked as though he was turning something in his mind.

"Think you can make a hitter of Ahrens?" he asked.

Buddy shook his head. "He pulls away from the plate. He drops his shoulder as he swings. Not a chance."

"Of course," said Poole, "something may have kept Neale away. Well, we'll see."

Next morning, as Buddy approached the school,

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a dozen boys met him. Neale, they told him, wasn't going to play ball.

"How do you know?" he asked.

"He told us."

"When?"

"A little while ago. He says he won't play ball for any sissy captain who goes around kow-towing to Irontown. He says if you ask him to play—— Are you going to ask him?"

"Yes," said Buddy. He was not interested in what Neale would tell him. He did not care. As captain it was his business to do what he could for Fairview. It was his business to invite Neale out.

He met the former captain in the main hall. There was no fencing. Buddy went right to the heart of his subject.

"Neale," he said, "we need you at second base. Are you coming out?"

Neale grinned. "Need me badly, eh?"

"We do."

"Well, you can go on needing. You've been a mighty fresh kid, and it's about time you got yours. I wouldn't play ball for you——"

"I'm asking you to play for the school," said Buddy.

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Neale flushed. He hadn't expected that. However, in a moment he had recovered his poise.

"That's your way of twisting it," he said. "You've been trying to boss things for a long time. Now that you've started you can run your own race. When I was captain you quit, and now you want me to help you. Nothing doing. That's final."

Neale went whistling down the hall and disappeared into a classroom. Buddy felt an arm go across his shoulders. He looked around and saw Wally Hamilton.

"Cheer up," said Wally. "We'll get along without him."

But Buddy had his doubts. He wanted Neale's big bat in the line-up. Ahrens's hitting was going to be a mighty weak substitute.

Accompanied by Carrots, Neale came to the practice that afternoon. He put on an air of vast amusement. After a while he walked over to where a group of six boys stood. At once the group broke up and he found himself alone. He growled something under his breath.

"Cut it out," said Carrots. "When you're hit, grin. Don't let them see they've got you."

"They haven't got me," Neale cried angrily.

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"Tell it to Sweeney," Carrots invited. "They've got you jumping two hurdles a minute."

Neale sulked. He couldn't understand Carrots of late. Instead of grinding his teeth and vowing vengeance, the huckster boy seemed to be sitting back and calmly watching.

The practice ended. The players gathered around Buddy. He spoke to them and they listened attentively.

"Gee!" said Carrots in admiration. "He surely has them, what?"

"You'll be pulling with him next," Neale cried in exasperation.

"Oh, I don't know." Carrots rolled a cigarette. "I guess I could do worse."

At that Neale took fright. Carrots was his only friend. He could not afford to quarrel.

"I—I didn't mean that," he faltered.

"Right-o!" said Carrots. "You bet you didn't. I'm wise." He puffed thoughtfully. "We're different," he said presently. "You're sore at Buddy and you go around like a bull dog. I'm sore at him, too. I hope his plans get kicked down the alley. But because I'm sore doesn't say I'm blind, does it?"

"Blind?" Neale questioned.

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"Sure. I'm watching him. He's got something. He didn't want me in there and I'm out. You put up an argument and you're out. Now he has that bunch working their heads off. That's going some, what?"

"They'd practice for anybody," Neale grunted. "They think it's fun."

"Nix!" said Carrots. "They wouldn't practice that way for you."

Neale bit his lips. He wished that Carrots would be more reserved with his opinions, but he dared not say so. The players straggled from the field. Buddy came last, walking with Wally and Poole. Poole's voice sounded distinctly.

"We may get some word tomorrow."

Neale turned triumphantly to his friend. "Yah! How long will they practice for him if he don't get games?"

"Maybe he'll get games," said Carrots. "You can't tell."

"Maybe he won't," said Neale. "I'll bet he's worried stiff."

Buddy was worried. This was Thursday. He had mailed the letters Saturday, and they had been delivered Monday. He thought he should have received one or two answers before this.

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The silence of the other schools sent a chill through his hopes.

Poole had said there might be a letter the next day. That night he lived in hopes. But Friday morning there was no mail stuck in the frame of the bulletin board, nor did any letters come during the day. After school he faced the nine with a smile.

"Nothing yet, fellows," he said.

He thought that that afternoon the practice lagged a bit. When the work was over he called them around him once more.

"Two o'clock tomorrow," he said. "That all right for everybody?"

Linguist, the outfielder, looked doubtful. "Can't—can't we skip tomorrow?"

"There may be word tomorrow," said Buddy. "I'll go to school in the morning. Mr. Minor always goes there on Saturday for mail."

Linguist brightened. "Two o'clock," he said. "That suits me."

After the others had gone, Buddy and Poole and Wally lingered on the field. They looked silently at one another.

"Something must happen mighty soon," said Wally.

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That's how Buddy felt. That night he dreamed about letters and postmen and baseball. In the morning he waited feverishly until it was time to go to the school.

There was no letter on the bulletin board. Perhaps Mr. Minor had not yet sorted the mail. Buddy knocked on the door of the principal's room.

"Come in," called a voice.

He entered. Mr. Minor looked up from his desk.

"Ah! Good morning, Jones. Draw up a chair. What brings you here on a Saturday?"

"I—I thought there might be some mail, sir."

"Mail? For you?"

"For me, or for Poole, or for the Athletic Association."

Mr. Minor took a dozen letters from his desk. He glanced through them. Buddy's heart stood still. The principal shook his head.

"Nothing, Jones. I'm sorry. Was it important?"

"Yes, sir."

"There's another delivery at three o'clock. If you care to come back you may find me here."

But at three o'clock the practice would be on. Buddy did not know how he could steal away

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without revealing how anxious he was. He said a husky "Thank you, sir," and turned toward the door. Then he caught Mr. Minor's eyes and stopped, for the eyes were deep, and grave, and kindly.

"This concerns the school, Jones?"

"Yes, sir."

"If you care to tell me——"

Almost before he knew it Buddy was in that chair beside the desk. He told of the Irontown meetings, and of Carrots, and of the mistakes that had been made, and of the evil days that had come to the school. He told, too, of the part that Poole had played and of the meeting of the A. A. at which Neale had resigned. His voice choked a bit as he told of the letters that had been sent, and of how the nine had been waiting for word that had not come.

The kindly look on Mr. Minor's face deepened. "Jones," he said, "the letter you sent is practically a pledge that the school will play fair in the future, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is there any reason why the schools should believe you are sincere?"

"Why, sir, the letter——"

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"Didn't the school break its first pledge?"

Buddy stared at the floor. So that was it. That was why no letters came. The school could not be trusted.

"You understand, Jones?"

"Yes, sir. But it's different now. We mean it, sir—we mean it. It isn't only a few fellows this time. It's the whole school."

Mr. Minor picked up a blotter, studied it, and moved it back and forth across his big, flat-topped desk.

"You think the school means it, Jones?"

"Yes, sir."

"You're sure the boys are not becoming champions of clean play just because they've been found out?"

"I wouldn't want to be captain of the nine if I thought that," said Buddy.

Slowly a warm smile spread across Mr. Minor's face. He tossed the blotter aside.

"Jones," he said briskly, "sometimes I have—— Do you know what a hunch is?"

Buddy smiled. "Yes, sir."

"Well, sometimes I have hunches. They generally come true. I have a hunch now. I have a feeling that your nine is going to play ball."

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"Oh!" Buddy jumped up. "You mean that, Mr. Minor?"

"I mean it," said the principal. "Stick to it, Jones. Do you mind passing me the telephone directory? Thank you. Good morning, Jones. Please close the door as you go out."

When the boy was gone the man opened the book. "There's a time," he said reflectively, "when a principal is justified in mixing into things." His finger ran down a column of the book. It stopped at a line:

High School, Irontown—156 Irn'tn.

He reached for the telephone. "Central? 156 Irontown, please." And then he waited, with the warm smile still on his face. "Perhaps," he said aloud, "it will make a difference if they know my boys are sincere."

Out on the road Buddy hurried toward home. Hunches, he knew, were only hunches; but somehow he felt hope burning once more in his heart.

At two o'clock he went to the village field. The practice was already on, but when the players saw him coming they quit their work and formed in a little group. Poole was there, too, and Poole looked vastly concerned.

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"Any mail?" Linquist asked eagerly.

Buddy shook his head. He still carried the hope that Mr. Minor had aroused. He tried to smile reassuringly, and the smile died. For several of the players were scraping their shoes in the dirt and looking dissatisfied and disgruntled.

"We might have had today off," Linquist grumbled. "I wanted to see the moving pictures."

"It isn't too late," Buddy said. He had decided on a bold stroke. "They don't start until three o'clock."

He saw Linquist give him a quick, surprised look. He waited for the outfielder to walk off, but the boy, undecided, held his ground.

"Well?" Buddy asked.

Linquist flushed. "I don't want to quit when there's a chance of the school needing me."

Buddy's face broke into a smile. He had won.

"Of course you're not going to quit," he said. He faced the others. "Fellows," he said seriously, "there's no use deceiving ourselves any longer. A week has passed. Not a school has written us. It looks bad. But I didn't send that letter hoping to wheedle games out of any of them. Did you?"

"No," cried Carlson.

"Then let us stick. If the games come we'll be

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ready for them. If they don't, at least we've played our part. Anyway, I have a hunch——"

"A big hunch?" Arthur Stone asked.

Buddy hesitated. "I—I've talked with a man," he said at last, "and I have a hunch. That's all I can tell you, fellows."

But, somehow, it seemed to do them good. They went back to the practice with more of vim. Even Linquist played as though his heart was once more in the work.

Poole waited until Buddy was free for a moment. Then:

"Who was the man," he asked, "Mr. Minor?"

Buddy gasped. "How did you know that?"

"I couldn't think of any other man who'd be interested," Poole smiled. "Is he going to help?"

Buddy told of his visit for mail and of the talk that had followed. Poole's eyes narrowed.

"There is a chance," he said. Suddenly he began to whistle. He did not know what Mr. Minor would do, but he was sure that the principal would do something. The future looked one hundred per cent brighter.

Neale came around before the practice ended. "Any games?" he asked Poole.

The president of the A. A. surveyed him calmly.

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"Interested, aren't you?"

"I'm interested in the school," Neale said stiffly.

"Then why aren't you out there playing ball?"

The former captain stalked away. From a distance he watched the work. After a while he strolled off with an air of satisfaction.

"The practice would be livelier than that if they had games," he muttered. "Pough! Carrots doesn't know it all."

Buddy walked home alone. The first week was over and he had held them. How much longer he could keep them practicing in the face of an empty future he did not know.

Monday morning he went to school with his pulse throbbing. If there was no letter—— He cast a glance at the bulletin board. No letter there. He saw a grin on Neale's face. He hummed a forced air of gayety and walked to his classroom.

There was practice that afternoon, but it was a practice of duty, not of pleasure. When it was over Buddy felt, for the first time, a sense of hopelessness. Mr. Minor's hunch seemed very, very far away.

Next morning there was nothing for him stuck in the frame of the bulletin board. But now he had begun to steel himself to expect disappointment.

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At noon he scarcely felt the pang as he again faced the empty board. He went in to classes. Poole came to the door and called him.

"It's clouding up," the president of the A. A. whispered. "It may rain and kill the practice. That will give us another day, anyway."

But the clouds scattered within half an hour and the sun came through. Buddy sighed and tried to bury himself in the lesson. Everything was against him.

At three o'clock his class was dismissed. He walked from the room moodily. He knew just what to expect. The players would be in the hall with a question in their eyes——

"Letter for you, Jones," came a voice.

The blood rushed to his face. Mr. Minor, standing in the door of his office, was holding out an envelope. Buddy took it with fingers that had suddenly grown moist.

"Th—thank you, sir," he said huskily.

In a moment he was surrounded by excited boys. Linquist pulled at his arm.

"What is it, Buddy? Where is it from?"

He glanced at the post-mark. "Hasbrouck," he said. His fingers ripped the envelope. He pulled out the letter.

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A sudden silence fell. He read it once, and then he read it again. He meant to be calm and tell them in a matter-of-fact voice. But all at once his pent-up emotions flowed over. His arms reached out and hugged the nearest boy.

"It's all right," he cried. "It's all right, fellows. Hasbrouck will be here tomorrow for a game."

CHAPTER XI

SCHOOL SPIRIT

THE practice moved that day with a glorious zest. There was no loafing, no indifference, no taking things easy. Every player was on his toes. The outfielders ranged from foul line to foul line and seemed never to tire. The infielders made seemingly impossible stops and impossible throws and impossible catches. Art Stone whirled his arms high above his head and pitched with crazy speed. Buddy felt that the world was his.

A cheering gallery lined the field. Hasbrouck was coming! The news had spread through the school. Boys ran home, dropped their books, and came scuttling back to the village green. Every play brought forth a yell. And toward dusk, when McCarter hit one of Arthur's curves a mile or two, there was an explosion of joy. McCarter was carried in triumph from the field. None no-

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ticed Ahrens trailing along alone. Ahrens had not made a hit.

Neale had not gone near the field. The news that Hasbrouck was coming had jarred him from head to heels. At first he had refused to believe. But Buddy had tacked Hasbrouck's letter to the bulletin board and Neale had read it after the others were gone. There could be no doubting now. The worst, so far as he was concerned, had happened.

He walked hurriedly through the village, up one road and down another, looking always for the huckster wagon. At last he saw it, and quickened his steps.

"Hello!" said Carrots. "What's eating you?"

Neale told his story. Carrots piled onions into a quart basket.

"The little runt," he said softly. "He did put it over, didn't he?"

Neale had expected sympathy. Instead, Carrots spoke as though he was almost pleased with what Buddy had done. Suddenly the former captain felt helpless and alone.

"You—you don't seem to be sorry," he said helplessly.

"You've got to give him credit," Carrots an-

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swered. "Anyway, I've been thinking about this, and I guess you were wrong from the start."

"Wrong?" Neale asked weakly.

"Sure! That ringer stuff was on the level. Gee! Can't you see it yet?"

Oh, yes; Neale could see it now. But his mind was filled with other things.

"You're not sore any more?" he asked.

"I don't know whether I am or not," said Carrots. "If I thought Buddy didn't like my face and made a fight on me just because—I don't know what to think." He stared at the vegetables. "Going to play tomorrow?" he asked.

"N—no," said Neale.

"You were a fool to quit," Carrots said calmly.

And as Neale walked toward home he thought that Carrots was right. He had been a fool to quit. He had put himself in the position of having everything to lose and nothing to gain. Tomorrow the nine would start to play again—and where was he?

He hoped that Buddy would once more ask him to play. He knew Ahrens's weakness and he knew his own strength. He knew, too, that were he asked again he would jump at the chance. But he could not bring himself to go to Buddy and volunteer.

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He began to understand Carrots. The huckster boy had always taken his association with high school teams in a spirit of good-natured superiority; as, for instance, a full-grown St. Bernard dog might take the antics of a terrier pup. When the fight on him had started he had resented it as a personal matter. He had fought back, not because he unduly valued his high school affiliations, but because to fight back seemed natural. Now, however, he had begun to see that the movement had been for a principle and had not been personal. Once that thought took root his animosity began to shrink. It had long been one of his sayings that "them that plays the games has a right to make the rules."

All this Neale could understand. But he could not fathom what Carrots could see in Buddy's actions to admire. To his mind Buddy was merely a favored child of fortune. He was lucky. Everything he did turned out right. A fighter? Bah! He just happened to stumble into things at the right time.

At no period had Neale been in sympathy with the new order of things. He wasn't in sympathy now. The ruling on ringers, he thought, was a piece of vivid foolishness. Whenever he had found

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a good player of the village idle he had tried to use him, and he had expected other schools to make similiar use of their opportunities. The right or wrong of the matter did not appeal to him at all.

But though he might sneer at present conditions, he had come to the point where he was willing to tolerate them. He was ready to play ball with the nine he had quit. All he wanted was to be asked.

Next morning he threw himself in Buddy's way. The captain said, "Hello, Neale," and passed on. Noon brought no better success. Then came three o'clock and the dismissal of classes.

Neale waited, hopeful, until the last player had gone off to the game. Sadly he tramped toward home. He had a fleeting notion of putting on his uniform and going to the field and just hanging around. But that, he reflected, would be advertising that he wanted to play. He went off to the game dressed as he was.

Carrots was leaning against a tree down beyond the left-field foul line. "Buddy's going to get licked," he said.

"How do you know?" Neale asked.

"Know? Gee! where's your noodle? Hasbrouck has been playing all season——"

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"But our fellows have been practicing."

"Piffle! You've got to face the things that break in a game. That's what makes a team—that's what gets it together. Practice won't do that. You watch."

Neale stared out at the field. A defeat would surely take Buddy down a peg. And yet he wasn't glad. He couldn't think of Buddy just then. His thoughts were all on the others—McCarter, Yost, Hill, Pilgrim—boys he had played with, boys he had captained. They were going to be defeated—his old nine.

Had Neale known it, those thoughts were his first steps back the right way. He would have laughed had you told him that. He stood there biting his lips and eating out his heart.

For it came hard to watch Ahrens playing second base. Every time a ball was hit to the right side of the diamond Neale's body moved as though he was after it. His hands tingled to feel the slap of a hard throw. His feet ached with the itch to be out there prancing. Oh! why hadn't Buddy asked him?

The game began. Hasbrouck went to bat. Her first boy flied out. Then Stone gave a base on balls. The next boy tried to bunt. He made the

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ball too hard. It bounded toward Hill, the third baseman.

Confusion seemed to settle over the field. Hill caught the ball but seemed undecided what to do with it. A moment of indecision and he threw to second. The throw was late. Both runners were safe.

"Team work," said Carrots. "I knew they'd be rusty."

Hasbrouck got two runs that inning. She should have been blanked.

The game ran on. At the end of the fifth inning the score was 6-1 in Hasbrouck's favor.

"This game will tighten up now," Carrots said. "Buddy's been working like a mule. He's bringing them around. Gee! he doesn't know how to quit."

Neale began to watch Buddy. The captain, it seemed, was never idle a moment. He appeared to observe everything. The fingers of his right hand were always busy. A signal to Arthur Stone; a signal to the infielders; a warning to Pilgrim to play in. And when, a moment later, Pilgrim caught the fly that came to him almost without moving from his place, Neale sighed.

"Some head, eh?" Carrots had seen it, too.

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Neale nodded, a slow, reluctant nod.

When his team was at bat Buddy became even more aggressive. He pleaded, he urged, he exhorted. In the ninth inning, with the score 6-3 against him, with two out and nobody on base, he was still fighting for hits. But Ahrens, the last boy up, struck out.

"One great game," said Carrots. He rolled a cigarette. "I wonder if Irontown will play them?"

"Irontown?" Neale laughed. "That bunch of saints?" He became curious. "Why?"

"Nothing," said Carrots. "I was just wondering."

The defeat did not surprise Buddy. He knew that no team can get in shape through practice alone. There must be the tense moments of actual conflict to sharpen wits, to tighten nerves, to give sureness and quickness to throwing arms. That was why, weeks before, he had advocated class games.

What bothered him was how the school and the nine would take the defeat. As the players stood around the bench gathering up gloves and sweaters, he tried to study them and to read their minds.

The Hasbrouck nine, bound for the dressing

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room in the high school, tramped past. The Hasbrouck captain stopped.

"Some game!" he said. "They told me you'd be easy after not having played in five weeks. They wanted me to leave some of the regulars at home and bring along substitutes." He grinned. "You're the toughest bunch of easy-marks I ever saw."

McCarter laughed. "Wait until we get another game or two under our belts."

The Hasbrouck boy nodded seriously. "You'll give Irontown a fight—— Got a game with Irontown?"

"Not yet," said Buddy. Irontown? His heart gave a jump. Would Irontown come back on the schedule? That was more than he had hoped.

He wasn't worrying about his nine now. He knew their temper. Nor did he long remain in ignorance as to how the school felt. As he walked home alone he got his first glimpse of school sentiment. Students waved to him and shouted that the nine had played good ball.

A load was lifted from Buddy's heart. At the same time he was face to face with something he did not understand. In the past every defeat had sent the students home grumbling and dissatisfied.

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Yet here was a defeat that seemed to dishearten them not at all. Why?

Next day he laid the matter before Poole. The president of the A. A. gave a slow smile.

"School spirit," he said.

"But there's always been school spirit," Buddy argued.

"Oh, no." Poole shook his head. "The fellows have gone out to the games and they've paid their A. A. dues. That isn't school spirit. School spirit is something that goes down deep. It stands in back of a team whether it wins or loses. It's being proud of your school, and proud of what it does, and proud of what it stands for."

"Oh!" said Buddy.

"We never had school spirit," Poole went on. "How could we? Could we be proud of teams that played ringers? But now the team is our team, and it's a clean team. It's the school. And whether it wins or loses the school will be with it."

Buddy took a deep breath.

"Makes you feel better, doesn't it?" Poole asked.

"Fairview seems to mean more," said Buddy.

When he reached the school that morning a glorious flood of letters awaited him. He read them to the students. Pompton and Bloomfield

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and Brunswick and Lackawanna promised games for next year. Garrison wrote that she would come to town Saturday for a game if the date was open.

"Open?" Carlson tossed his cap toward the ceiling. "Telephone her, Buddy; telephone her. Do it now!"

Buddy telephoned from Mr. Minor's office. The call was charged to the A. A. The principal smiled quietly.

"Everything all right, Jones?"

"Yes, sir." Buddy paused with his hand on the door. "That was a mighty good hunch, Mr. Minor."

"Clean play is a better hunch, Jones," said the man.

Buddy went to his class with the vague impression that the principal had praised him.

There was another letter awaiting him at noon. Gates High School had a game for them the following Thursday provided they could come to Gates.

"We'd go to the North Pole for a game," said Linquist. "Now if Irontown——"

"Wake up!" cried Yost. "That's too much. She's the school we trimmed with Carrots."

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But next morning a letter from Irontown arrived.

Buddy came to school early that morning to search for some mislaid notes. Mr. Minor was in his office and the janitor was sweeping the halls. Aside from the two men the building was deserted.

The letter was stuck in the frame of the bulletin board. Buddy read it with fast-beating heart:

"MR. LEO JONES,
 "Fairview High School.

"DEAR SIR:

"Irontown H. S. will be pleased to meet Fairview H. S. Saturday week. As we have already played at Fairview this season, we feel that Fairview should come to Irontown for this game. Sincerely yours,

"CHARLES A. DRAKE."

Buddy tacked the letter to the board. A game with Irontown! He felt like shouting with joy. The big game was back on the schedule. With Irontown resuming athletic relations every school would now lift the ban. Fairview would be admitted to the county league.

Buddy found his notes. Then, instead of coming out to the main hall, he stayed in the classroom. Presently he heard footsteps in the hall,

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and laughter, and then a voice crying, "Hey, fellows! Look at this." Then followed silence. Suddenly there was a shout.

"Irontown's back! Saturday week! Who's going to the game?"

From the noise it appeared that everybody was going. After a while Poole appeared at the doorway of the classroom. He came over to Buddy's desk.

"Isn't Drake the prince?" he said softly. "Not a word about the past?"

Before Buddy could answer another head appeared in the doorway. Somebody shouted, "Here he is." A moment later the room was full of cheering boys. They pounded his shoulders and tried to lift him up for a speech. But Buddy broke away and grinned at them from a corner.

McCarter jumped on a seat. "Fellows!" he cried.

They became silent.

"That letter from Irontown means we're going in the county league. Let's be a real school. Let's be like Irontown. Let's have cheers and cheer leaders and a school song."

A dozen boys shouted at once. The discussion became a confused uproar. The boys surged out

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into the hall leaving Buddy alone. Just before classes started Poole came back to the room.

"They've appointed committees," he said.

"They're going to do it," Buddy asked, "song and all?"

"Song and all." Poole smiled quietly. "Neale's on the cheer committee," he added.

Buddy gasped. Neale? He looked up at Poole with a question in his eyes.

"School spirit," said the president of the A. A. "It's coming. Neale will feel it, too. Just watch what happens."

At noon Buddy saw the former captain. He was walking along with the members of his committee. His eyes were on the ground and he seemed to have but little to say.

As a matter of fact, Neale wasn't quite sure but that the whole thing was a dream. Irontown back on the schedule! And he a member of a committee to get up a cheer! It all seemed unreal and impossible.

His committee met that afternoon at three o'clock. Neale would have preferred to have gone off to the practice. There was a big chance, he thought, that he would be invited to play. Ahrens had had two opportunities to drive in runs against

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Hasbrouck, and each time Ahrens had failed miserably.

"Buddy knows I can hit," Neale reflected, "and he knows Ahrens can't."

However, he stifled his desires and went to the meeting. This was Thursday, and they wanted to have the cheer ready for Saturday's game with Garrison. He hoped that the business would soon be finished. Instead, half a dozen cheers came up for consideration, and it was well after five o'clock before a selection had been made. Neale walked home feeling that he had lost a day.

After supper he met Carrots and told about the Irontown game. The huckster boy grinned.

"So he put that over, too, didn't he?"

Neale nodded moodily. Even yet he could not understand it.

"I could give him a hand," Carrots said slowly. "I could make that game mighty easy for him."

"What game?"

"The Irontown game, you boob. What game do you think I'm talking about?"

Neale gasped. "Is that the kind of dream you're having? Wake up! He wouldn't let you pitch in a hundred years."

"Who said anything about pitching?" Carrots

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demanded. Presently he shook his head with the air of a boy who had told too much. "Gee!" he said. "I'm talking through my hat."

Nevertheless Neale, as he walked home through the quiet village streets, was sure that Carrots had not been fooling. The huckster boy did know something that would be of value to the nine.

Next day cheering practice started. Three cheer leaders led the uproar. At first it was ragged and without rhythm; then by degrees, as the students learned to watch the rise and fall of the leaders' arms, the noise began to sound like something. By the time the nine left for the village field at three o'clock the cheering had become quite respectable.

Neale went to the practice that day. A dozen times he placed himself where he knew Buddy would see him. But no invitation to play came to him. Once he thought he saw Poole looking at him in a peculiar fashion, and he turned away. He was afraid of Poole. The president of the A. A. had an uncanny way of reading a fellow. He did not want Poole guessing what was in his heart.

But Poole had guessed. After the practice the president of the A. A. waited for the baseball captain.

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"Neale wants to play," he said abruptly.

"How do you know?" Buddy demanded eagerly. "Did he say so?"

"I can read it in his eyes," Poole answered.

Buddy shook his head slowly. "I can't," he said. "I've thought it all out since the Hasbrouck game. There is something greater than hits at stake. We're having our first trial of a clean team. Neale's the only fellow in school who opposed that clean team. Now, if we go begging—— Can't you see it, Poole?"

Poole nodded. "I see it now."

"If we go to him, he will come to us just as big as he was in the old days. If he wants to, he can turn up his nose at our ideas of fair play. We won't be able to say beans; we sent for him. He can even try to make trouble if he wants to by stirring up fresh opposition. But if he comes to us, he has to accept what we stand for and the last ounce of opposition will be gone. Next year or the year after no fellow will be able to say, 'Neale fought them and they had to send for him.' That—that's how it strikes me, Poole."

"I guess you're right," said Poole. "It's the big thing against the little thing. Yet if we had Neale——"

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"We'd stand a chance to win our games," Buddy interrupted quietly. "I'm captain. I'd like to have a winner—but the school comes first."

Next day Garrison came to Fairview and romped away with a 7-4 victory. Once more team play told. It was not the things that Fairview did that counted heavily against her, it was the things she didn't do. Time after time she failed to take advantage of her chances.

And yet, all through the game, the Fairview students lined the field and cheered loyally. Even in the last inning, with the nine hopelessly behind, the cheering did not lose a bit of its fervor. Truly, a new spirit had come to the school.

Neale and Carrots had gone to the game. Carrots, with shrewd baseball sense, had watched the whole picture. Neale had watched only Ahrens. He had seen the second-baseman let good balls go, and swing at wide pitches. And he had clenched his hands and had wondered why, why, why Buddy did not come to him.

The game ended. Garrison left the field. The students scattered. But Buddy and Arthur Stone and Ahrens remained.

"Hello!" said Carrots. "What's up now?"

Art went to the mound. Buddy put on his mask.

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Ahrens stepped to the plate. Carrots gave a low sigh.

"The game little rooster," he said. "Trying to teach Ahrens to hit."

Neale turned away. He knew the truth now. He wasn't going to be asked.

He did not wait to see how this practice would end. Had he stayed he might have felt better. For Ahrens, though he tried and tried and tried, did not seem able to get the knack of meeting the ball. Buddy hid his disappointment.

"You'll get it after awhile," he encouraged.

Ahrens said nothing.

The captain started for home feeling pretty much discouraged. At the edge of the field he met Carrots. He expected some kind of taunt. Instead, the huckster boy called a friendly "Hello!"

"Hello!" said Buddy. What did this mean?

"Good game," Carrots said. "You gave them a fight all the way."

"We threw away our chances," Buddy said frankly.

"Shucks! They've been playing ball right along. That counts. Got Irontown back, haven't you?"

"Yes." Buddy looked at him keenly.

"Hope you win," said Carrots. Abruptly he

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swung around and strode away, leaving Buddy blinking in astonishment. Carrots wishing him luck! What was going to happen next? Wait until he told Poole.

But Poole took the news calmly. "I always said there was a good streak in Carrots. He's square in his own way."

"I guess he is," said Buddy.

The second defeat did not dishearten the school a bit even after they had had Sunday to think it over. Monday the students demanded when the school song would be ready. The committee smiled tantalizingly. Then, at noon, it suddenly appeared, tacked to the bulletin board:

Come, lift your voices, let them ring,
To Fairview's praise and glory;
No stain shall darken any page
Of Fairview's splendid story.
Then here's to her, long may she light
The path of honor and of right.
Fairview, the bravest of the brave,
Long may her noble banners wave.

Though storms may threaten to engulf,
And tempests may arise;
Her courage shall throw off the yoke,
And break misfortune's ties.

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Then here's to her, long may she light
The path of honor and of right.
Fairview, the bravest of the brave,
Long may her noble banners wave.

In silence the students read the song. The words seemed to sober them. They turned away with none of the usual good-natured pushing and quarreling. Their school, of a sudden, had begun to mean something that it had never meant before.

"How about music for it?" a voice asked quietly.

"Wally Hamilton has the music," somebody answered. "Practice at his house tonight."

The hall was deserted when Buddy read the song. His blood thrilled as he repeated:

"Then here's to her, long may she light
The path of honor and of right."

Oh! Wasn't that fine? It was like the new spirit that had come to Fairview—the spirit of clean play.

Up to this point Buddy had gone his way hoping only that the nine would make a good showing. He understood its handicap. Now, however, the song reached in and stirred his ambitions. He wanted to hear it sung with a swing of victory.

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He wanted his nine to break misfortune's ties.
He wanted his nine to win.

When he came to the village field that afternoon he brought this new ambition with him. His voice changed. It took on an electric quality, and the spark of his desires fired his companions. They played snappier ball than they had ever shown before. Suddenly Buddy began to hope.

And then came the batting.

One by one the players stepped to the plate. They all managed to bang the ball or to make respectable bids for hits. Finally it was Ahrens's turn.

He faced Arthur Stone with no show of confidence. The first pitch was wide. He swung.

"Take your time," Buddy called.

The next ball was right over the heart of the plate. Ahrens let it go.

By degrees Buddy's patience began to wear thin. He wanted to win, he wanted to win—and here was the weak link.

"Oh, come on, Ahrens," he called. "Try to meet it."

The second-baseman flushed. Never before had Buddy spoken sharply to him. He lost his head and swung at a wild pitch.

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"Won't you ever learn to wait for them?" Buddy demanded sharply.

"I'm doing the best I can," Ahrens muttered. "I never was much of a batter."

"You never will be," Buddy flared. It was hard to see this one boy upsetting his hopes. "Come on; let somebody else hit."

Ahrens walked away from the plate with hanging head.

As long as the practice lasted, Buddy was conscious of a pair of hurt eyes looking at him from the second-base position. They haunted him all through supper. They would not let him study. At length he pushed his books away. Maybe a walk in the air would do him good and clear his brain.

But the outdoors did not comfort him in the least. Slowly Buddy became angry. What right had Ahrens to plague him in this fashion? Was it his fault if Ahrens couldn't hit? Hadn't he been mighty patient?

Next he began to sympathize with himself. Had ever a captain been so tormented? He wanted to win, and here was a fellow who couldn't and wouldn't learn. He'd drop him, that's what he'd do. He'd get somebody else for his place. No

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fellow was going to hang on and make him miserable in this way.

So engrossed did he become in his thoughts that he paid no attention to where his steps led him. He heard the sound of singing. He looked up with a start. Down the street was a house with windows all a-light. The singing stopped and he heard cheering and laughter.

Wally Hamilton's home! He understood. They were practicing the school song. He had forgotten.

He stood outside the gate wondering if he should go in. While he stood there the singing started again:

"Though storms may threaten to engulf,
And tempests may arise;
Her courage shall throw off the yoke,
And break misfortune's ties.
Then here's to her, long may she light
The path of honor and of right.
Fairview, the bravest of the brave,
Long may her noble banners wave."

The words, tacked to the bulletin board, had been impressive enough. Set to music they stirred Buddy powerfully. Slowly he walked away. Two lines kept repeating themselves:

"Then here's to her, long may she light
The path of honor and of right."

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Was it right for him to dog Ahrens? Was it honorable? Ahrens was giving his best—a loyal, whole-souled best. What more could anyone ask?

His mind went back over the past. Ahrens had always been willing. Ahrens had never complained. Suddenly Buddy began to feel sorry for what had happened that afternoon. He had allowed his selfish ambitions to lead him from the path of honor and of right. He had struck at a friend.

He turned into the next street. There was no hesitation now. He walked as a boy who knew where he was going and what he was about to do. Presently he stopped in front of another house. The front rooms were dark, but a light showed from the kitchen window.

Buddy made a megaphone of his hands. "Euuuuu—ho!"

After a time the front door opened. A boy came out on the dark porch.

"Who is it?"

"Buddy."

Ahrens came down to the gate. "You're going to drop me, aren't you? I'm not sore. I've been expecting it ever since the Hasbrouck——"

"Who said anything about dropping you?"

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Buddy interrupted. In the face of loyalty like this he felt mean and cheap.

"Well, aren't you?"

"No."

"You're not?" Ahrens demanded in astonishment.

"I'm not."

"But after today——"

"Forget it," Buddy said. "I'm sorry for today. I was a fool. Tomorrow we'll try again."

CHAPTER XII

CARROTS TO THE RESCUE

NONE of the members of the nine had attended the singing practice at Wally Hamilton's. Buddy had thought it best that they stay away. He wanted them to give all their thoughts to baseball and not mix up in any other school activities. Plenty of time to learn the song next week when the baseball season would be over.

Consequently, when the nine assembled for practice next afternoon, only Buddy knew how the song could sound coming from half a hundred throats. Of course, boys had been humming the air in school all day, and the players were more or less familiar with the melody. But they did not know the power of the song sweeping forth in a mighty chorus.

Ten minutes after the practice started, the students came marching to the field in a body. Buddy,

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batting grounders to the infielders, drew a deep breath. He knew what to expect. Would it thrill the players as it had thrilled him? He waited. The chorus came:

“Come, lift your voices, let them ring
To Fairview’s praise and glory——”

The players became statues. It was as though a magic wand had been waved over the field and they had all been turned to stone. The first verse ended and still they did not move. The second verse came to a close. The chorus died away.

Yost shook himself and blinked his eyes. “Gosh!” he muttered huskily.

One by one the players came out of their trance. Only Ahrens was left standing motionless and staring straight ahead.

“Ready?” Buddy called.

The second-baseman did not move.

“Ahrens!”

He gave a start and a slow smile. He pulled his glove on a bit firmer and fell into a crouch. Buddy hit the ball to him. He snapped it up and shot it away with dazzling speed.

“Oh!” Buddy breathed in delight.

The whole team responded to the song. Even

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in the batting Ahrens scratched a hit. He was as pleased as though he had driven out a home run.

"Now you're getting it," Buddy encouraged.

"I—I want to make good for you," the boy said shyly.

Twice more, before the day was done, the students sang the song. Each time the nine responded as only a nine can that has never before been stirred by a school hymn. And when at last the practice was over, Wally Hamilton ran out on the field.

"Did you ever see anything like it?" he asked Buddy excitedly.

"School spirit," Buddy answered. "It makes all the difference in the world. Who wrote the song?"

"Poole."

Buddy nodded. He might have known. Who else could have put into words the fine things that Fairview hoped to accomplish?

The students were breaking up and drifting away in groups. Neale walked off alone. Wally nudged the captain.

"Did—did he sing?" Buddy asked.

"Toward the finish," Wally answered. "I guess the song got him."

"That song would get anybody," Buddy said.

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Next day the nine traveled to Gates. Mr. Minor had excused the players from afternoon classes. At noon the students gathered in front of the high school building and sang the song again as a parting message. After that came the new school cheer. Tacked to the end of it was something that no Fairview athlete had ever heard before:

Team, team, team.

"Gosh!" said Yost. "We're getting all kinds of new stunts, aren't we?" But, despite his careless words, his eyes held a suspicious moisture and his cheeks were flushed.

Buddy had often heard that baseball is a mighty uncertain game. Today he was to learn just how contrary the game can be when it sets out to try. He went to Gates thinking that if the nine fielded and batted as well as it had done the day before he would stand a big chance of bringing home a victory. The nine fielded better. The players batted like fourteen-karat sluggers, even Ahrens getting a hit. Nevertheless, despite the fielding and the batting, Fairview lost.

For Arthur Stone, usually a steady, dependable pitcher, fell upon an evil day. His curve refused to work, his fast ball was a joke, and his control

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was a frost. By the end of the sixth inning Gates led 11-6.

At first, while Fairview had been hitting, Buddy had hoped. Gradually he came to see that hitting alone would not win handicapped as it was with such rocky pitching. He decided to save what he could from the wreck. When the sixth inning was over he walked in with Arthur.

"We'll let Ahrens pitch the next," he said.

Arthur's mouth dropped. "Ahrens? Am I that bad?"

"I don't mean it that way. I want to save you for Irontown."

"But if they hammer Ahrens and get a lot of runs——"

"We must think of Saturday's game against Irontown," Buddy said.

But his face was grave as he took his place in the coaching box. Suppose Gates scored a mess of runs? Would it have an effect on the players? Would a bad beating throw a scare into the school?

The nine had brought along no substitutes. Arthur went to second base and Ahrens went to the mound. Gates got three more runs that inning and two in the eighth. The final score was 16-9.

Buddy shook his head sadly. Had anyone told

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him, that morning, that his team would score nine runs, he would have counted the game as won. Instead, it had been lost.

All during the ride back to Fairview he listened anxiously to the talk of the players. They were hopeful, planning this and that play to use against Irontown. So far so good.

But what about the school? Here were three defeats in a row, and the last defeat the worst of all. What would the school think of those sixteen runs?

The stage pulled up at the post office. Arthur Stone gave a gasp.

"Mackerel! Looks as though all the fellows are here."

The students were jammed along the sidewalk. They gave a cheer for the team as the stage stopped. A moment later they called for Buddy and the score.

Buddy stood up. "They licked us, fellows; sixteen to nine."

A spell of silence. Then:

"Did we get nine runs, Buddy?"

"Yes."

"Hitting or errors?"

"Hitting," Buddy answered.

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"Oh!" The voice gave a glad shout. "Wait until those bats go against Irontown."

Buddy hid his head and blinked his eyes. How was that for spirit? He might have known; and as he swung down from the stage the song started:

"Come, lift your voices, let them ring,
To Fairview's praise and glory——"

Carrots leaned against the post office window and watched the scene. It was the first time he had heard the song. Vaguely it stirred him. In the past he had always felt at home with the high school boys. Now he was conscious of a change. This was a different crowd, with different thoughts, different feelings, different ideals. And, though he knew every boy there by name, they all seemed strangers to him.

He heard Buddy call the score. His eyes snapped. Sixteen runs. Gee! what a trimming. He watched the captain, and presently a slow smile crossed his face.

"Still in the ring," he muttered. "And Neale thought that lad could be bluffed."

The gathering broke up. Neale edged his way over to Carrots. McCarter approached carrying a satchel. The huckster boy caught his arm.

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"Tell us about the game," he invited.

McCarter stopped. "Art was off," he answered. "Buddy yanked him in the sixth to save him for Irontown."

"Who finished the game?"

"Ahrens. Five runs in two innings."

Carrots grinned. Yanked him for Irontown. Foxy move. Then the grin became thoughtful. He had been out of touch with things of late. He knew that Irontown had gone back on the schedule—Neale had told him that—but when was the game? He asked McCarter.

"Day after tomorrow," said the shortstop.

"Day after——" Carrots jumped. "Say, do you fellows think you can send Art back so soon?"

"He'd go back tomorrow if Buddy and the school needed him," McCarter said. "We all would."

"Gee!" Carrots gasped.

Here was some more of that change he had noticed among the high school boys. The stage rolled away, but he was not conscious that it had gone. Absent-mindedly he made a cigarette, stuck it in his mouth and forgot to light it.

Carrots had what he was pleased to call "sporting blood." His sympathies were generally with the under dog. A good stiff fight moved him to

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admiration. He liked gameness, courage, sand. He thought that Buddy had made a mighty game fight. He knew what it was to try to whip a disorganized nine into shape. He knew the size of Buddy's job, and he could appreciate what the young captain had faced—first the Hasbrouck defeat, then Garrison, and now Gates with the worst beating of all. Yet, instead of whining and making excuses, Buddy bravely planned for Irontown. Carrots's heart warmed.

"He's up against it," he said aloud.

"Who?" Neale asked.

"Buddy."

Neale said nothing.

"They hit the old pill today," Carrots went on. "They've found their eyes. If they could get some good hitting practice tomorrow they'd be in clover. Where are they going to get it?"

"Art Stone," Neale answered.

"You're a pill," Carrots breathed in disgust. "How did you ever become captain of a nine?"

"Because the fellows wanted me," Neale said angrily.

"They're pills, too," Carrots informed him. "Art Stone! Where's your noodle? Come to think of it, I guess I did your thinking for you when

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you were captain. Look here: Art pitched six innings today; he's got to pitch again Saturday. And you talk of having him pitch to the batters tomorrow?"

"I'll bet Buddy sends him out," Neale mumbled sullenly.

"Nix!" said Carrots. "Not Buddy."

He remembered his cigarette and lit it. Gee! what a fight the kid had made, taking his punishment in silence and asking odds from nobody. He hadn't had a square chance. Everything had been against him. Somebody ought to jump in and give him a hand—especially against Irontown. Carrots didn't like Irontown. He had all the rancor that the small town boy sometimes feels against the boy from the city. Besides, Irontown had started all this fuss about his playing.

Thinking of Irontown shifted his mind to a new angle. Buddy had had a hand in that fight. Just why *had* Buddy jumped on him? What *had* been the captain's real reason?

Carrots had had very little book learning, but he was sharp. He owned his share of native shrewdness. Quite wisely had he interpreted the singing of the school hymn. It meant that instead of being a group of boys with divided interests, the stu-

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dents were now welded together with a great united interest—Fairview. The big frame building was no longer a common-place structure of classrooms and halls. It was their school, hallowed by many memories. The day when outsiders could break in and usurp a place was past.

Carrots could dimly feel the forces that had brought this about. But—how about Buddy? Had the captain merely steered what he thought was a fair and square course? Or had he been moved by a secret grudge against one Carrots O'Toole?

"What's the matter?" Neale demanded impatiently. "You look like a fellow in a trance. Going to stay here all night? It's getting dark."

Carrots threw the cigarette away. "I want some dope," he said, "and I want it right away and I want it straight."

Neale's impatience was wiped out. His eyes opened with surprise. "About what, Carrots?"

"About this ringer stuff. Irontown and the other schools were all on the level, what? No ducking now."

"I—I didn't think——"

"Can that," Carrots interrupted. "What do you think now?"

"They—they were on the level."

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"And how about our fellows—are they on the level, too?"

"Yes."

Carrots dug his hands in his pockets. "All right. Now we get to Buddy. He kicked all along about me, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

The volley of questions had come so unexpectedly that Neale was bewildered. "I don't know," he stammered. "Maybe——"

Carrots took him by the arm. "Maybes don't go," he said sharply. "Does Buddy believe in this clean play stuff? Is he a real bug like this fellow Drake? You've seen him at school and at A. A. meetings. Is he?"

"Y—yes."

"And how about his scrap on me? Was that on the square? Was it just because he was against ringers no matter who the ringer was? Or was he sore on me? How about it, Neale? Was he sore on me?"

The former captain took a deep breath. His brain had cleared. Carrots wasn't asking these questions for fun. Perhaps Carrots could be of help to Buddy—he had said he could. But, if he

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thought Buddy didn't like him, would he help then?

Neale took another deep breath. Buddy had displaced him and had humiliated him. Here was a fine chance to throw a rock in this freshman captain's path. All he had to do was to tell Carrots that Buddy had——

A faint chorus carried to his ears:

“No stain shall darken any page
Of Fairview's splendid story——”

No stain, no stain. Ah! that was it. No stain by a Fairview boy.

“He—he was on the square, Carrots,” Neale whispered.

“You mean it was ringers and not me?”

“Yes.”

Carrots brought his hands together with a loud slap. “Then it's all off,” he said.

“What's all off?” Neale asked.

“Something that was holding me back. Come on.”

“Where?”

“Come on.”

Carrots's long legs carried him quickly over the ground. Neale had almost to run to keep up. They

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turned off Main Street, walked three blocks, and then turned down a darker road.

"Going home, Carrots?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"I want to show you something."

The house before which they stopped was of the poorer sort. Even in the darkness it somehow suggested that it was in need of repair. Carrots went inside. A few minutes later he came out. Off he led Neale again, back over the way they had come.

"Couldn't you find it?" Neale asked.

"I found it." Carrots did not slacken his steps. "Too dark to look at it down here."

Presently they were back on Main Street. They stopped in front of the stationery store that had Fairview flags displayed. There, in the light of the window, Carrots held something out for inspection.

"That's it," he cried triumphantly.

Neale saw a small, leather-bound, pocket memorandum book. He looked at Carrots blankly.

"What is it?"

"It's the dope on Irontown," Carrots answered.

"Her signals, the weaknesses of her batters, every-

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thing. Gee! with that there'll be nothing to it. Buddy will have a cinch."

Neale took the book and opened it. There were the offensive signals—for a steal, for the hit-and-run, for the bunt. He turned another page.

"There!" Carrots's finger pointed to some penciled notes. "What couldn't Art do with that? See what somebody did—made a note of every player's weakness. Look at it."

Neale read a few items:

"Cullen—Goes after wide ones outside. Too anxious. Coach him to wait.

"O'Brien—No good on a high ball. Kills a low one.

"Keith—Always wants to slug. Slow ball fools him. Make him use short-arm punch at the ball."

Neale turned another page.

"The battery signals," said Carrots. "See, the pitcher gives the signals for them, not the catcher. There they are."

Neale looked them over. Six signals, and in a moment they were unconsciously engraved on his memory. He turned to the fly-leaf of the book. He saw three initials written in ink: "C. A. D."

Suddenly, to Neale, came the memory of a day when he had walked with Carlson and had shown a letter.

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"Oh!" he cried excitedly. "I know who owns this, Carrots."

"Who?"

"Drake. These are his initials. When he wrote canceling the second game, he said he had lost a book——"

"That's when I found it," Carrots interrupted calmly.

"When?"

"After the first Irontown game. I just studied it and made up my mind that those fellows would feel sick the next time I faced them. Gee! this is rich. Think of Drake handing up his nine to us this way."

Slowly Neale closed the book and handed it to Carrots.

"I'll take this to Buddy," said the huckster boy. "As long as he's not sore at me I'll do him a good turn and help him beat Irontown. I don't hold a grudge."

Neale experienced a vague feeling of uneasiness. Something was wrong, but what it was he could not guess. It put him in mind of a forgotten word that lurks rebelliously on the tongue but will not come. He felt that he knew what that something wrong was—and yet he didn't.

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"Well," Carrots demanded, "what's the matter now?"

Neale shook his head. "There's a slip some place," he said.

"Where?"

"I—I don't know."

"Aw!" said Carrots, "you're a pill. Wait here for me. I won't be long."

He strode away. His mind was full of his mission. He and Buddy hadn't been friends, but tonight would end all that. He was going to do the kid one mighty big favor.

Arriving in front of Buddy's house, he did not bother to whistle outside the fence. He pushed open the gate. As his foot struck the bottom step of the stoop he saw a form arise from a chair on the porch.

"That you, Buddy?" he demanded. Then as he came closer: "Say, I've got something to show you."

"Show me?" Buddy asked.

"You bet. It's about that Irontown game. Can we go some place where there's light?"

Buddy led the way up to his room. He caught a glimpse of Bob looking on in wonder from the dining-room door. He was just as much mysti-

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fied as his brother. What could Carrots have to show him?

Once, had the huckster boy come to him, he would have looked for some hidden trap. Of late, though, there had been a change. Hadn't Carrots wished him luck only a few days ago?

He sat on the bed and gave his visitor the chair. Carrots leaned closer.

"The nine's in a bad way, isn't he?" he asked.

"Bad way?" Buddy fenced. What did this mean?

"Aw!" said Carrots, "don't try to bluff. I want to do you a good turn. Going to have any batting practice tomorrow?"

Buddy hesitated. What harm could come from telling the truth? Besides, Carrots had a wise old baseball brain.

"No," he said.

"Just when the fellows were beginning to hit. That's bad, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And Art Stone—how about him? You're afraid he'll blow again, what?"

"Yes," said Buddy. "With only one day's rest——"

"Don't tell me," Carrots broke in. "I know."

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He leaned back, and stared across the room, and enjoyed the bewilderment on Buddy's face.

"Look here," he said suddenly, "suppose I tell you how you can win that game."

"Oh!" Buddy jumped up from the bed. "Could you, Carrots?"

"You heard me. Suppose I tell you what their signal is for a steal and for a hit-and-run. Suppose I tell you their battery signals. Suppose I tell you the batting weakness of every player on the team. I guess that would help, what?"

Buddy's eyes were eager. "How do you know all that, Carrots?"

"I found a book on the field after the Irontown game. It's all in that book—batting weaknesses and all."

"You found a book?"

"Sure. I didn't tell anybody. Tonight I heard you hadn't been fighting me personally, so I said, 'Here's where I do Buddy a good turn.'"

Buddy's voice was low. "Whose book was it? Do you know?"

"Drake's," said Carrots. He took the memorandum from his pocket. "Here it is, Buddy. It's all here."

But Buddy's hand closed over his and forced

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the book back. They stared at each other. At first there was amazement in Carrots's eyes, then doubt, and then understanding. His face suddenly darkened.

"It's true," he said bitterly. "You're sore at me. You won't take my help."

"I'm not sore at you," Buddy answered.

"But——"

"It isn't square, Carrots. That's all. It isn't square."

"You won't take it," Carrots asked in astonishment, "just because you think it wouldn't be fair to Irontown?"

"Yes."

"After they had the nine blacklisted?"

Buddy nodded.

"Gee!" said Carrots. "That's going some!"

Slowly he dropped his hands. He looked at the book and presently put it back in his pocket. He knew it would do no good to argue. He thought Buddy a fool, and yet—and yet he respected him. For Buddy was standing up for his ideas, and that much Carrots could understand.

"I suppose you know your own game," he said. "I thought I'd do you a good—— Say, what about hitting tomorrow?"

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Buddy shrugged his shoulders. He did not know. Carrots stared down at the floor.

"I won't be busy tomorrow," he said.

Now it was Buddy who looked at the floor. Not so long ago Carrots had swaggered out on the field and had spoiled the class games. What would the players think if he came back?

"Well," said Carrots, "I guess I'll be going."

Buddy made up his mind. There was no rule to prevent a village boy practicing with the team. Not even the spirit of fair play would be violated. And the players did need a chance to bat against some speedy pitching.

"We'd like to have you out there," he said.

Carrots dropped his cap. "Honest?" What he saw in Buddy's face made him bolder. "And say, if I see something—a fellow handling himself wrong or something—can I tell him about it?"

"I guess you can," said Buddy. He felt like cheering. Carrots knew baseball. If he wanted to, he could be as fine a coach as one could ask. No danger of him saying things now that would taunt and sting.

The two boys walked down to the gate. Buddy experienced a sense of unreality. Half an hour

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before he had been wondering how in the world he would provide pitching for his hitters tomorrow, and now the problem was solved. And solved by Carrots O'Toole. What wonder would happen next?

All at once the humor of the situation struck him. He began to laugh. Carrots looked at him suspiciously.

"What's the joke?"

"I don't know," Buddy answered honestly. "A short time ago we were looking daggers at each other, and now——"

"Aw!" said Carrots, "I like your style. See you tomorrow. So long."

He walked back toward Main Street. He wasn't in a hurry now. His steps were leisurely, as befitted a person who had done a good night's work. He found Neale still waiting patiently in front of the stationery store. There was a brooding look on the boy's face as though some problem he wanted to solve was skipping around in his head and baffling him.

"Still thinking about that slip some place?" Carrots asked.

Neale came out of his thoughts with a start. "Oh! You're back."

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"Sure I am. I'm going to pitch to the fellows tomorrow."

"What?"

"Right-o! Makes your eyes pop, eh? Buddy said he'd like to have me. And I'm going to help coach the nine. What do you know about that?"

Neale knew nothing about it. The earth seemed to have turned itself upside down. Suddenly a question popped into his mind.

"How about the dope on Irontown?" he demanded. "What did Buddy say about that?"

Carrots had forgotten. He put his hand in his pocket and drew out the memorandum.

"Gee!" he said, "what do you think? Buddy wouldn't touch it. He thought it wouldn't be square."

And then Neale awoke to what it was had been troubling him—that vague something wrong that he had not been able to name. He had known all the while that Buddy would not accept the book.

CHAPTER XIII

WHAT HAPPENED AT IRONTOWN

NEALE did some deep thinking after he left Carrots. He was awake at last to a full realization of the new spirit that had taken possession of the school. Weeks before he had admitted to himself that the fight against ringers was probably sincere. He had even been genuinely thrilled by the school song. But it was Buddy's refusal to take advantage of Irontown that made him see how thoroughly clean and honest the new spirit was. He would never doubt again.

More than once his cheeks flushed as he thought of the part he had played. Carlson had surrendered; Carrots had surrendered. Whatever shame had come to the school was of his making. He wondered, now that he saw things in their true light, why the fellows had not thrown him out of the last A. A. meeting. What a figure he must have cut in their eyes!

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Because he was a high school student with advantages that Carrots had been denied, he had secretly thought himself superior to the huckster boy. Yet, while he had held back and had questioned, Carrots had had the sense to see that Buddy was square. More than that, Carrots had had the courage to offer to help. Neale's flush deepened.

"I'll see Buddy in the morning," he vowed. "I'll play for him if he can use me. What a fine Turk I've been!"

Next morning he came to school anxious to tender his services and get the business over with. He saw Poole on the outdoor steps.

"Buddy here yet?" he asked.

"No." Poole gave him a sharp glance.

Neale hesitated. Then he remembered that Poole was Buddy's friend. "I thought he might be able to use me," he said.

"On the nine?"

"Yes."

Poole was wise. He knew the value of a friendly word spoken at the right time. He dropped a hand on Neale's shoulder.

"Good boy," he whispered.

"I ought to have gone to him sooner," the former captain muttered. Nevertheless, he was

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pleased. He was glad that he had told Poole.

Soon Buddy appeared. Neale went forward to meet him.

"I—I'd like to play if you need me," he said, and turned his head away.

Several minutes passed. Buddy did not answer. Neale, still with his head turned away, said in a low voice:

"You think I'm trying to worm into the Iron-town game. It isn't that. It——"

"I know it isn't," Buddy said.

Neale swung around and faced him. "You know it isn't?"

"Yes. Never mind how I know. You've wanted to play for a long time. You're all right, Neale. You saw things wrong, that's all."

"That's plenty," Neale muttered. Gosh! wasn't Buddy making it easy? No wonder the fellows followed him so loyally.

There was another silence. Neale plucked at a button on his coat.

"Of course," he said, "if you don't need me——"

"I do need you," Buddy broke in. "But there's something else to be considered. I'm thinking of Ahrens. He's given me his best. He came out at the start——"

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"And I didn't."

"I don't mean it that way," Buddy said gently. "But he's been with me, Neale. He's earned the right to some consideration. Against Gates his hitting was good. I can't throw him down this way at the eleventh hour."

"I—I guess you can't," Neale acknowledged huskily. "You're square all the way through." His disappointment was keen, yet he told himself honestly it was all his own fault.

"I'll start Ahrens against Irontown," Buddy went on. "He's entitled to his chance. But if he falls down—you wouldn't want to go along as substitute, would you?"

"Could I?" Neale demanded.

"Glad to have you," Buddy answered. "Could you come out for practice this afternoon?"

"I'll be the first fellow on the field," Neale grinned. He felt a great peace. He could walk into school now and look every fellow in the eye, even Poole.

Before classes Buddy told half a dozen boys that Carrots would be out that afternoon to help the nine. His announcement was greeted with blank looks and incredulous stares.

"Carrots?" Wally Hamilton asked weakly.

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"He came to me last night," Buddy explained. "We had a talk. There's nothing to prevent a village boy coaching——"

"Is he going to *coach*, too?"

"Yes."

"But last time——"

"This is this time," said Buddy. He smiled at his chum. "It's clean and fair, Wally."

"Oh, I'm not thinking that," Wally protested. "But Carrots—he understands he can't get in the game, doesn't he?"

"He understands everything. He wants to help us, that's all."

Wally forced a brave smile. "Carrots surely knows the game," he said.

Buddy entered his classroom. He could see that Wally was doubtful. The whole school would probably be doubtful. Everything depended on Carrots. If he carried off his part the right way all would be well. On the other hand, one false move might spell trouble. Buddy began to see that in accepting the huckster boy's aid he had taken one gloriously uncertain chance.

Assembly that morning brought a surprise to the students. Usually, on Friday, Mr. Minor sent the boys back to their class-rooms immediately

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after prayers. Today, however, he detained them.

"For some time," he said, "I have noticed a gradual change of spirit among the young men of this school. I have been with you two years. When I came here, I was distressed. I was accustomed to young men who took a pride in their school and what it stood for. Here I found students who seemed dead to many of the finer impulses. I attended several ball games, and instead of finding young men who were loyally sustaining to their school team, I found young men who thought it smart to try to harass the rival players. There was no love of their own school. There was simply a feeling of animosity toward the rival school.

"But, as I said before, there has been a change. I have heard you sing a school hymn. Two lines have impressed me:

"Then here's to her, long may she light
The path of honor and of right."

"Young men of Fairview, carry the spirit of those words into your daily lives. Stand for them. They represent Fairview. They represent you. And because I know they represent you, and because I know they are not idle sentiment, I am proud of you."

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The assembly room was very quiet. Buddy felt his heart swell as though it would burst. He stole a glance at Neale. Neale's eyes were blinking.

"I understand," Mr. Minor said suddenly, and now his tone was light, "that Fairview and Iron-town will be busy tomorrow."

The tension broke. Several boys laughed.

"I hope, incidentally, that Fairview will do more business than Irontown."

The laughter became general.

Mr. Minor's eyes swept the hall. His smile died away and his face became serious again. The laughter stopped.

"Young men of Fairview," the principal said quietly, "good luck to you."

Buddy was sure that he had never heard a finer talk. He went back to his class-room prouder than ever that Fairview was his school.

At noon he found several of the players awaiting him near the bulletin board:

"What's this I hear about Carrots?" Yost demanded.

"Is he going to coach us?" Linquist asked.

"Fellows," said Buddy, "I wouldn't have Carrots there if I didn't think it was right. He's going to be one mighty big help to the nine."

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The players looked at one another.

"That's good enough for me," Yost said suddenly.

"For me, too," Linquist added.

The players walked away. To Buddy the afternoon's work began to look brighter.

He went to the village field as soon as classes were over for the day. The players had not yet begun to practice. He told them that Neale had rejoined the squad. McCarter gave a slow, sarcastic smile.

"Will he be with us today, Buddy?"

"Yes."

"Came back just in time for Irontown, didn't he?"

"He isn't going to start the Irontown game," Buddy said quietly. "He's going as a substitute."

Ahrens had been staring down at his glove. He looked up quickly and looked down again. McCarter's sarcastic smile faded.

"Does Neale know he's only a sub?" the short-stop demanded.

"He does," Buddy answered.

"And he's coming just the same?"

"Yes."

"I take it back," said McCarter. "He's all right."

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A few minutes later Neale appeared, looking somewhat embarrassed.

"O Neale!" McCarter yelled. "Here go." The shortstop threw a baseball. Neale raised his hands. As the ball plunked into his glove he ceased to be self-conscious. He was once more a member of the Fairview nine.

The practice started in earnest. Nevertheless, though the players attended to their work, they kept watching for Carrots. Presently he arrived. Instead of stalking to the center of the diamond and taking command, he halted outside the foul lines. When he caught Buddy's eye he waved a greeting, but stayed where he was. Every boy took notice.

Buddy came to him at once. "Need a warm-up?"

"A couple of minutes will do." Carrots looked around the field and nodded awkwardly to the players. They nodded awkwardly in return.

Later, when he went to the mound, the old swagger was gone. Yost came to bat. Carrots pitched. Yost missed a vicious swing.

There was no mocking laugh from the pitcher. He walked in to take Buddy's throw.

"You start your swing too late," he said. "Try to time it."

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Yost accepted the advice in silence. He met the next pitch and drove a grounder at McCarter. He started to walk away from the plate to give the next boy a chance.

"Try it again," Carrots called. "Watch the speed and meet it."

Yost tried again and scratched a single. As he picked up his glove and began to play his position he wigwagged a signal to Linquist. The signal read, "All right."

It didn't take the players long to discover that the Carrots they had with them today was not at all like the Carrots they had known. Their awkwardness and restraint melted. Soon they were calling to him as good-naturedly as though they had never questioned his coming. But Carrots, though he laughed and joked and caught the emotion of the practice, did not become so familiar as of yore. The new school spirit had erected an invisible barrier. He was helping and they were his friends. Nevertheless there was a difference that could not be bridged. They were Fairview boys. He was not.

Three times, that afternoon, Neale came to bat. Twice the former captain hit safely. Later, when Ahrens's turn came, something like tension showed

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in the faces of the players, as though they were watching a contest.

Twice Ahrens swung and missed. Carrots came in to the plate.

"Choke your bat," he ordered. "That's it; hold it close up. Now! Draw it back a bit. So! Snap at the ball. Never mind swinging. Just snap."

Ahrens hit a grounder.

"That's the stuff," Neale called. He did not seem to resent the fact that Ahrens was receiving special coaching. Yet he knew that his only chance of getting into the Irontown game was if Ahrens failed to hit.

For ten minutes the boy stayed at the plate. He caught the knack. He began to meet the ball. When he finally went back to his position, flushed and somewhat pleased, Neale slapped his shoulders as he passed.

"You're getting your eye," the former captain encouraged.

Ahrens shook his head. "You're the hitter," he answered. For the rest of the afternoon he had a thoughtful, preoccupied air.

When the practice ended Buddy felt a new measure of confidence. The players had not lost the batting eyes they had found at Gates. True, they

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had not hit Carrots's pitching with any too great freedom; but then, Carrots's hurling was superior to anything they would face at Irontown. The big encouragement was this, they had made Carrots pitch.

As soon as the work was over the players gathered around Buddy. Carrots walked off the diamond, picked his coat from the grass and quietly prepared to depart. He could hear a low hum of excited voices coming from where the nine was gathered.

"So long!" he called.

"Wait!" Buddy cried.

He waited. Presently the hum of voices stopped. He looked around and saw the baseball squad coming toward him.

"Carrots," Buddy said, "we appreciate what you did today, and we'd like to have you with us tomorrow."

"At Irontown?"

"Yes."

Carrots was startled. "But Irontown—— Gee! What would they think? That's the school I rung in against."

"That's all past," said Buddy. "If you care to go——"

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Carrots sighed and shook his head. "I'd like to; honest I would. But I don't want to go along and do nothing, and just sponge around on you fellows——"

"You could keep score," Yost broke in.

Carrots's eyes brightened. "Could I? Then I could sit on the bench. Is that all right, Buddy—about keeping score?"

"All right," said Buddy.

The huckster boy threw back his shoulders. "Believe me," he said proudly, "tomorrow will be one big day."

In fact, the day was to be one of the greatest in Fairview's history. Not a student had watched the practice that afternoon. This did not mean that interest in the nine had died. It meant that the boys were busy preparing in other ways for the morrow.

In the past a handful of students had usually accompanied the team to Irontown. Tomorrow the whole school was to go. Each boy had been assessed twenty-five cents, and three stages had been chartered. Today, instead of coming to the field, the students had spent their time nailing flags and bunting to the sides of the vehicles. Fairview was going to travel to the Irontown game in style.

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The nine had planned to use the passenger coach on which they had always journeyed to Irontown. A few minutes after Carrots had gone, and while the players were still grouped around Buddy, Wally Hamilton came along puffing and gasping.

"I—I was a-afraid I'd miss you fellows. Chowder! W-wait until I get my breath. I ran all the way."

"You look it," McCarter grinned.

Wally fanned himself. "You fellows—are to come along with us."

"With the students?" Buddy asked.

"Yes. We chartered another coach. Poole took up a collection. It was a few dollars short and they voted to supply the balance out of the A. A. treasury. Say, this is going to be some trip."

The players were quite ready to believe him. They demanded to know how the stages looked.

"Wait!" said Wally. "You'll see them tomorrow. One o'clock, fellows, at the post office."

The squad broke up. The captain had not gone far when Ahrens's voice halted him.

"O Buddy!"

The second-baseman had the air of a boy who was anxious to get something off his mind.

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"Neale can hit all around me," he said hurriedly.

"If you want to play him, I won't mind."

"Won't you?" Buddy asked.

"Well——" Ahrens hesitated. "I'll mind, of course. I'd like to play. But I'll step aside if it's going to help our chances."

Buddy's face grew soft with the emotions that stirred him. "How do we know it would help our chances?" he asked.

"Neale can hit."

"Suppose you hit against Irontown. You hit against Gates."

"Oh!" Ahrens began to look happier.

"You're entitled to your chance," Buddy said. "I'll start you. If you fall down——"

"I won't," Ahrens said in a low voice, "if trying hard will help."

That night, after supper, Buddy got out his score-book and arranged the batting order for the next day. Afterwards he sat on the porch with Bob and talked about the nine's chances and about Carrots, and about the many changes that had come of late.

"You like Carrots?" Bob asked.

Buddy nodded. "I do now."

"Because he's helping the nine?"

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"Oh, no. I like him because he's trying to be square. I guess he's had it pretty hard."

"How?"

"Every way. He hasn't had it easy like us fellows who could go to high school and get an education."

Bob said nothing. But at nine o'clock, when Buddy started up for bed, he put a friendly hand on his brother's arm.

"You're all right, kid," he said. "Good luck tomorrow."

The morrow brought a cloudy and overcast sky. Buddy had a panicky fear that there would be rain. However, at ten o'clock the clouds began to break and patches of blue sky showed.

Buddy was too excited to eat much dinner. Shortly after noon he set forth for the meeting place. He thought he would be the first one there. Instead, when he came in sight of the post office, Main Street seemed filled with boys.

The stages had just arrived and were drawn up at the curb. They made a gay picture. School flags stuck out from the front, from the rear, from the sides. The school colors were everywhere. Even the horses had been decorated. And stretched along the top and along the sides of each vehicle

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were yards and yards of red, white and blue bunting.

Wally Hamilton dug Buddy in the ribs. "Chowder! I guess that's not so bad."

Buddy held his breath. It was great.

To make sure that no one would be left behind, Poole had prepared a list of the students. Now he began to check names and send boys into the stages. They climbed in with shouts and yells. One boy had brought a bugle. He blew a loud, brassy tarat-ta-tata. The horses jumped, and stuck up their ears and began to shy.

"Whoa!" yelled the drivers. "Put that thing away."

The bugle was sidetracked, and the danger of a runaway was averted.

The nine had its own stage. One by one the players arrived—Yost, McCarter, Carlson, Linquist, Neale, Ahrens, Hill. Next came Pilgrim. Only Arthur Stone was missing. Presently he appeared, walking with Carrots O'Toole. Carrots was talking earnestly, and Arthur was listening as a pupil might listen to the counsels of a wise teacher.

"Look at Carrots," Pilgrim whispered.

The huckster boy had made a pathetic effort to improve his appearance. His shoes were polished.

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His clothing had been brushed and ironed, and one frayed trouser leg had been trimmed with a scissors. His face had been washed until it had almost a soapy shine. Truly, this was a Carrots that none of the fellows had ever seen before.

He approached the coach almost shyly. Pilgrim made room.

"Squeeze in here, Carrots," he called.

Carrots squeezed in between Pilgrim and Yost. He sent a quick look around the coach. Apparently none of the boys were paying attention to his changed appearance.

Arthur Stone grabbed Yost's arm. "Let me sit next to Carrots," he pleaded.

Yost gave up his seat. McCarter cried a jovial: "Tell him how to do it, Carrots."

The huckster boy was soon at his ease. Pilgrim winked at Buddy. They had managed that nicely, hadn't they? Buddy winked back. They surely had.

The one o'clock whistle blew at the iron works. A belated boy ran down Main Street and climbed breathlessly into the nearest coach, only to be told that he belonged two coaches further down. Poole consulted his list and waved his hand at the drivers. The boy with the bugle pleaded for just one blast,

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but was squelched. The horses pulled at their traces. The coaches creaked and groaned and moved ahead.

Fairview was off for its game.

Grammar school boys of the village cheered from the sidewalk and thought enviously of the day when they, too, would be in high school. Wally Hamilton hauled a megaphone from under his seat.

"Everybody sing," he bellowed.

Everybody sang:

"Come, lift your voices, let them ring,
To Fairview's praise and glory;
No stain shall darken any page
Of Fairview's splendid story.
Then here's to her, long may she light
The path of honor and of right.
Fairview, the bravest of the brave,
Long may her noble banners wave."

The nine, riding ahead in the first coach, felt sure that they could give battle to a dozen Iron-towns.

"Some song!" Carrots said huskily. He began to wish, vaguely, that he had had something that had not been denied these boys around him.

Out into the open country the coaches rolled. The dust arose in a cloud from hoofs and from

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wheels. But all the dust in the world, it seemed, could not dry out the lusty throats that were cheering and singing.

The players, riding ahead, had planned to discuss the game on the trip. Somehow, though, they all sat there strangely quiet. Even Carrots forgot to tell Arthur Stone the many wise things a pitcher should know.

At last they entered Irontown. Small boys ran along the sidewalk keeping abreast of the coaches. The procession drew up in front of the Irontown High School.

Irontown students stared curiously from the granite steps of their school. Never before had such a turn-out visited town.

"Yah!" said Carrots. "We've got them guessing."

The students remained in their coaches, but the nine piled out to the sidewalk. Led by Buddy, they walked toward the high school entrance.

And as they walked, cheers followed them. One by one each player was remembered. Finally there was a pause. By this time Buddy and the players were inside the building. Then, faintly, the cheering broke out again. The last of it came stronger: "Carrots, Carrots, Carrots!"

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Carrots grinned sheepishly.

A boy piloted the nine through the gymnasium in the basement, on to the locker room. There they donned their uniforms.

"Our fellows are on the field," the Irontown boy volunteered. "I'll take you there as soon as you're ready."

They were ready in a very few minutes. Off for the field they started. Carrots brought up the rear, a score-book under his arm.

A turn down one street, a turn up another street—and there was the field. The Fairview wagons were off to one side. Massed in front of them were a group of boys. From the group swept a delirious cheer that ended: "Team, team, team."

Fairview trotted to its bench. Sweaters were dropped and the players spread out, throwing four or five baseballs around. Drake came over to Buddy and shook hands.

"Glad to have you here," he said, and motioned to where the coaches stood. "Fairview never sent an outfit like that before. The whole school's here, isn't it?"

Buddy nodded.

"It's a fine thing," Drake said seriously. "It——"
He stopped, and his eyes traveled to Carrots.

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Buddy tried to shift the conversation. He asked what kind of season Irontown had had. Drake answered shortly. His eyes were still on Carrots, and presently he found an excuse to hurry away.

Buddy turned toward the Fairview bunch. His heart was beating fast. He could understand how Drake felt. Irontown had broken with Fairview because Fairview had used a ringer. And here was Fairview, with words of fair dealing on her lips, and the ringer still with her.

"That guy's sore because I'm here," Carrots said.

Buddy made no denial. The Irontown players left the diamond and Fairview took possession for practice. Buddy reached for his glove but did not go out. He was watching Drake.

"They won't chase me, will they?" Carrots asked anxiously.

Buddy did not know. Perhaps, he thought, he should have left Carrots home. It would be humiliating if the huckster boy had to march from the field.

Drake was surrounded by his players and was talking rapidly. Suddenly he swung around and came back toward the Fairview bench.

"Good night!" said Carrots. "Here's where I

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get mine. They won't even give me a chance."

There was something so hopeless in his tone that it struck at Buddy's heart. After all, he had brought Carrots here. He was responsible for him. He went forward and met the Irontown captain halfway.

"That's O'Toole on your bench, isn't it?" Drake demanded.

"Yes."

"What's he doing here?"

"He's with us."

Drake threw back his head as though his faith in something had been shocked. Buddy clutched his arm.

"Listen!" the boy pleaded. "I can't tell you all about it, but he's here with clean hands. We're not trying any ringer stuff. He knows he can never again play with a Fairview nine. I asked him to come because—because—— Oh! I had a reason, Drake. Everything's fair and square."

Drake studied Buddy's face. His eyes became thoughtful.

"Did you have a long talk with him—I mean before you asked him?"

"Yes."

"A talk about baseball?"

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"Y-yes," said Buddy. "He wanted me to do something. He didn't understand, that's all. I—I think he understands now."

Drake glanced toward the Fairview bench. He remembered Carrots as an insolent, swaggering player. Now, as he studied the huckster boy, the change that he saw decided him.

"All right, Jones," he said. "I guess a fellow couldn't talk to you long and not be square. It gave me a shock to see him here. It's all right, though. Shake!"

They shook hands for the second time that day. Buddy came back to the bench.

"Did that guy want to know about me?" Carrots asked uneasily.

Buddy nodded.

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him that it was all right."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing else."

"And he took your word for it—about me?"

"Yes," said Buddy. "Come on, Art. Warm up."

Carrots sighed. They took Buddy's word for it. No questions or anything—they just took his word for it. Suddenly he felt a great desire to be like

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that some day, and have people take his word for things without doubt or question.

Somebody handed him the Irontown line-up. He copied it in the score-book and let the book slip down on his knees. Take his word without question? Gee! who'd take his word for anything? Maybe if he had better clothes, and schooling——

He stared across the field. Who was it who had been a poor boy, and had split rails for a living, and had had very little schooling, and had nevertheless become President? Who was it? Who—— Oh! Abraham Lincoln.

Arthur Stone had finished his warm-up. He came to the bench, slipped on a sweater and sat down. Carrots edged over.

"Art."

"Yes."

"Know anything about this fellow Lincoln?"

"What Lincoln?"

"Abraham Lincoln."

The pitcher looked around in surprise. "What about him, Carrots?"

"He was pretty smart, wasn't he?"

"You bet."

"Well, how did he learn it all?"

"By study."

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"But he didn't go to school much, did he?"

"That doesn't stop anybody who wants to learn."

"No? Doesn't it?" Carrots was surprised.

"Certainly not," Arthur answered. "Of course, it's easier if you can go to school and have somebody teach you. But if you want to learn, all you've got to do is get your books and dig in."

"Gee!" said Carrots.

So you could learn just from books. He hadn't thought of that. Slowly his chin squared and he thrilled to the first spark of ambition that had ever stirred his blood. Well, he'd get some books. Selling vegetables and splitting rails—it was all one. He was just as good as a rail splitter. He'd get some books and he'd study, and he'd get up in the world—and some day, maybe, people would take his word without question, too.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PATH OF HONOR

THE fielding practice ended. The players came in to the bench. Irontown took the field. The umpire announced the batteries. Carrots looked down at the batting order:

Pilgrim, rf.
Hill, 3b.
Linguist, lf.
McCarter, ss.
Ahrens, 2b.
Jones, c.
Carlson, cf.
Yost, 1b.
Stone, p.

"Pilgrim up," he called. "Hill on deck."

The right-fielder went out to the plate. The Fairview cheer rattled about his ears. He set his lips and studied Paul Worth, the Irontown pitcher.

It was wise generalship that had influenced Buddy to make Pilgrim the lead-off man. Pitchers

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are seldom at their steadiest during the first inning, and Pilgrim was a good "waiter." He did not put himself in the hole by being too anxious to hit.

Today he justified Buddy's selection. He let the first two offerings pass, and the umpire sustained his judgment. Then came a strike. Then a ball and another strike.

"Three and two," said Carrots. His pencil hovered over the score-book.

"Ball four," said the umpire. Pilgrim threw away his bat and trotted down to first. Carrots put four dots in the score-book—::—to indicate that the right-fielder had secured his base on balls.

Hill sacrificed. Linquist, itching to bat Pilgrim home, struck at a bad ball. He lifted a foul into the air, and the catcher caught it as it came down.

Irontown cheered. McCarter went to bat. Worth made a wild pitch, and the ball plunked into the shortstop's ribs. McCarter went down to first base rubbing his side but not at all displeased.

Ahrens came to bat.

"Choke it," Carrots whispered hoarsely. "Mind what I told you."

Buddy felt a sudden sorrow that Neale was not in the line-up. With Neale at bat now—— He

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thrust that thought aside. Ahrens was entitled to his chance.

Neale's voice came from the coaching lines: "Take your time, Ahrens. Make him pitch. Take your time."

Worth hurled the ball. It was wide. It struck the edge of the catcher's glove and rolled a few feet.

Pilgrim dashed for third, and McCarter dashed for second. The catcher jumped and recovered the ball. He threw to Drake, and the Irontown captain brought the leather down on Pilgrim's sliding figure.

"Out!" ruled the umpire.

"Pretty work," said Carrots; "pretty work."

The side was out. Ahrens had come to bat in a pinch, but had had no chance to show what he could do.

Fairview took the field. Neale came in and sat down next to Carrots.

"Too bad they got Pilgrim," he said. "Ahrens might have hit them both in."

"Sure," said Carrots. But in his heart he doubted. Ahrens had looked too tense and too nervous.

Arthur Stone, apparently, was due for a good game. He struck out the first boy, McCarter

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threw out the second, and Drake—the mighty Drake—popped a fly to Hill. The first inning had ended with honors even.

Neither team scored in the second. Ahrens had his first try. He hit a weak grounder and was thrown out. As he started back for the bench Neale, from the first base coaching box, gave him a smile.

“Better luck next time,” he said.

Ahrens hoped so, but wasn't any too confident. Every ball he had struck at had seemed easy, and yet the best he could do had been a measley little grounder.

Neither team scored in the third. This, the spectators told each other, was a grand little game. The Fairview students were already hoarse from much cheering. How their voices were going to last for six more innings might have worried a throat specialist, but it didn't worry them at all. Nothing—nothing, in the third. Wow! Little old Fairview was going some.

Then, in the fourth inning, the ice was broken.

It was Arthur Stone who started the fireworks. As a rule, pitchers cannot hit, and Arthur did not run contrary to tradition. But Worth made the mistake of holding him too cheaply. The Irontown

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boy sent a straight ball right over the heart of the plate. Arthur swung, and the sphere shot down the right field foul line.

"'Rah!" shrieked the Fairview students. No set cheer. Oh, no; nothing like that. Just a wild, hilarious "'Rah!"

The blow unsteadied Worth. Pilgrim, good waiter, was up, and Worth pitched two bad balls. He pulled himself together. He had to get in a strike or he'd be hopelessly in the hole. He tried another straight ball, and Pilgrim banged out a single. Arthur dashed home with the first run.

The Fairview students fell over each other in their delight. Wally Hamilton pleaded for "A real cheer, fellows," but they told Wally to go soak his head. Hit a home run, Hill! Hit a home run!

But, though the students might lose their heads, Buddy remained calm. They were in the lead. Better to play the game safe. He signaled Hill to sacrifice, and the third-baseman laid down a pretty bunt. Pilgrim slid into second.

Lingvist smashed out a single. Pilgrim scored.

Riot broke out in one part of the field. A chorus swept across the diamond:

"Come, lift your voices, let them ring,
To Fairview's praise and glory——"

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McCarter strode to the plate. By this time Worth was all upset. He pitched with nervous haste, and McCarter rapped the first ball for a double. Linquist stopped on third.

The chorus became stronger:

"Fairview, the bravest of the brave,
Long may her noble banners wave."

It was Ahrens's chance to distinguish himself. He went to the plate with the hosts of Fairview begging him for a hit—and none begged harder or more sincerely than Neale.

Ahrens, unable to hold his bat still, swung and missed.

"Strike one!" cried the umpire.

Drake ran in to the mound. "Get this fellow, Worth. He's easy. Look at him. He can hardly wait for you to pitch the ball."

Worth managed to control himself long enough to shoot in a curve that Ahrens ignored.

"Strike two!"

Carrots shook his head. "Poor kid!" he said. "He's gone."

Ahrens swung at the next pitch.

"You're out!" ruled the umpire.

Ahrens turned back toward the bench and hung

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his head. Buddy passed him, bound for the plate.

"Brace up," said the captain. "We've got two runs, anyway."

But Ahrens did not brace up. He sat on the bench and stared gloomily across the field. He had fallen down.

The students howled to Buddy to kill it. He swung at the first pitch and felt a glorious tingle as wood and leather met.

Carrots jumped up from the bench. "Yah! Look at that."

The ball, however, fell foul by inches. Buddy came back to the plate. If he got another like that——

This time the ball went fair. The Irontown shortstop jumped, but it cleared his glove. Linquist and McCarter scored. Four runs!

The song, hoarse and wobbly now, began again:

"Come, lift your voices, let them ring,
To Fairview's praise and glory——"

Worth had had enough. He retired from the diamond, and a tall slim boy took his place. He surveyed Carlson calmly, and pitched. Carlson hit. The ball rolled to the first-baseman for an easy out.

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Buddy ran over to Neale as that boy left the coaching box. "Study this pitcher," he said. "If Ahrens comes up again in a pinch, I'll put you in."

Neale nodded. His eyes took fire. Study that pitcher? You could bet he would.

Carrots was an old bird at this game of baseball, but those four runs had stirred him up. He felt the need of stimulation. His hands ran into his pockets. First came a bag of tobacco, then some small, thin papers. He rolled a cigarette.

There was nobody to prevent him lighting the little white stick, yet he didn't. Of a sudden it dawned on him that he was the only boy here who smoked. Buddy did not use tobacco, and Buddy's word was taken without question.

Slowly Carrots crumbled the cigarette. Grains of tobacco ran between his fingers. He opened his hand, and looked at the wreck he had made, and cast it from him. He was through. Books and no cigarettes. That was the way. He looked up and saw Neale watching him with a smile of understanding.

"Don't ever start," Carrots said savagely. "Then you won't have fellows laughing at you when you stop."

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"I'm not laughing," Neale said. "I—you're a good skate, Carrots."

"I'm going to be a better skate now," Carrots answered. "Hello! There goes a single. Won't it be a joke if Irontown gets four runs?"

But Irontown got only two. In the fifth she got another, and in the seventh she got one more. Meanwhile, Fairview had not scored again. The score was now 4-4.

Arthur Stone came in to the bench and threw down his glove. "I'm a fine lemon," he said in disgust. "You fellows give me a four-run lead and I can't hold it."

"We'll get a few more runs," Buddy cried cheerily. He knew better than to show he was worried. "Who's up?"

"Ahrens," said Carrots.

Buddy's eyes met Neale's. The captain shook his head ever so slightly. This wasn't a pinch. He couldn't take Ahrens out now.

The second-baseman hit one right at the pitcher and was thrown out. "I could stay up there all day and I wouldn't get a hit," he told himself miserably. "Why didn't Buddy use Neale?"

Out among the students they were asking the same question—why hadn't Neale been used? But

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any doubts that entered their minds did not dampen their loyalty. The cheering and the singing, though hoarse and husky, were as staunch as ever.

Fairview didn't score in her half of the eighth. Carlson raised the school's hopes by singling after two were out, but Yost was not equal to the emergency. He popped an infield fly.

Then it was Irontown's turn.

Her first two batters were speedily retired. Drake came to the plate. He had a determined, business-like air as though he had made up his mind to do something. Buddy's fingers telegraphed a signal:

"Walk him?"

Arthur shook his head and came forward for a conference. "He's been biting on out curves all day," he said. "He'll bite again."

Buddy wasn't so sure. "He looks as though he's all prepared for something, Art."

"Suppose I feed him just one curve," the pitcher suggested. "Then if he looks dangerous we'll walk him."

Buddy nodded and scurried back to his place. Arthur pitched.

It was an out curve. Drake stepped as far in as the rules allowed. His big bat swung out and met the ball before it had a chance to really break.

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"Gee!" whispered Carrots.

The ball arched out toward right center. Both Carlson and Pilgrim ran for it, but it fell yards in front of them and bounded away across the grass.

Drake had rounded second. The coacher on third jumped into the air.

"Take your time," he yelled.

Drake slowed down to a trot. He crossed the plate and nodded to Buddy, and then ran happily toward his own bench. His school was in the lead.

Buddy felt a dejection that sat heavily upon his soul. Why hadn't he ordered Arthur to walk Drake? To carry the fight right up to the eighth inning and then to lose was mighty tough luck.

A snatch of loyal song reached his ears above the din of the Irontown cheers:

"Though storms may threaten to engulf,
And tempests may arise,
Her courage shall throw off the yoke,
And break misfortune's ties——"

Buddy's spine stiffened. Who said lose? This was only the eighth inning. They still had a chance.

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"Come on, Art," he called. "This fellow couldn't get a hit in a week."

The pitcher turned a weary face toward the batter. The Irontown boy swung and lifted a foul.

"Mine!" Buddy cried. The ball settled into his big mitt.

The ninth inning had come. Here was Fairview's last chance. The score was 5-4 against her. If she did not get another run the game was gone.

The players spread out along the bench. Neale prepared to go to the first-base coaching box.

"Let Yost coach," Buddy said. "You stay here, Neale."

Neale found a seat. He knew what the order meant. If Ahrens's name was reached, he would be sent to bat instead of the second-baseman.

"Art's up," said Carrots. "Come on, Art; you started that other rally."

Arthur smiled sadly. One hit a month was about his limit.

Neale crouched and stared out at the diamond. From the first-base coaching box he had seen practically nothing but the Irontown pitcher's back. Now he could look squarely at the boy. As he watched, the pitcher's gloved hand moved.

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Neale frowned. What did that move mean? He had seen it explained some place, yet the solution evaded him.

He heard the crack of a hit. The Irontown shortstop fumbled and Arthur was safe on first.

"We're off," cried Carrots. "Watch him, Pilgrim."

Again Neale studied the pitcher. That gloved hand kept moving, now this way, now that way. What in thunder did it mean?

Pilgrim hit to the infield and forced Arthur at second base.

Hill went to bat. The pitcher's glove moved.

"Drop," Neale muttered unconsciously.

The pitcher threw a drop.

Then Neale remembered and understood. The signals he had glanced at for but a moment as he held Drake's note-book all came back to him.

"Out curve," he whispered.

The pitcher threw an out curve.

"Straight ball. This is the one to pickle."

Hill drove out a single. Pilgrim ran all the way to third.

Delirium broke out among the Fairview students. Linquist had his chance to be a hero. He lifted a lazy fly to the outfield. The catch was made so

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close to the diamond that Pilgrim did not dare to try to score. Two were out.

McCarter went to the plate. Fairview's song came pleadingly across the field:

"Come, lift your voices, let them ring,
To Fairview's praise and glory——"

Neale edged forward until he was almost off the bench. Ahrens followed McCarter. If McCarter got on—— The Irontown pitcher's glove moved. Neale's heart leaped. Oh! McCarter was going to be given his base on balls.

Neale ceased to watch the game. He rubbed his hands on his knees. He'd bat in place of Ahrens. He'd wait until the pitcher signaled a straight ball, and then——

"Two balls," said Carrots.

Slowly a shadow crossed Neale's face. Carrots had had Drake's book for many weeks. He had studied it from cover to cover. He knew the signals, too. Yet he sat there and made no attempt to help the nine because he knew Buddy wanted no such help. It was win or lose on the square.

The singing went on:

"Though storms may threaten to engulf,
And tempests may arise——"

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"Ball three," said Carrots.

"Her courage shall throw off the yoke——"

"Ball four." Carrots's voice was husky. "Now's our chance. Three on. Ahrens up."

"Neale will bat for Ahrens," said Buddy.

Neale stopped and selected a bat. His hands trembled. Nobody would know. He had only glanced through the book. Nobody would think he had remembered the signals.

The song seemed shouting itself in his ears:

"Then here's to her, long may she light
The path of honor and of right.
Fairview, the bravest——"

Honor! Honor! Neale sighed and dropped the bat.

"I can't, Buddy," he said. "I know every ball that pitcher throws."

"How?"

"I can read his signals."

"That's all right. If you've doped them out sitting here——"

"I—I saw them in the book," Neale answered weakly. "I didn't know I had remembered them until a few minutes ago."

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He sat down. He felt Carrots's hand press his leg and he turned his head away.

"All right, Ahrens," Buddy said quietly. "Go to bat."

The players on the bench sat stunned and silent. They knew nothing about Drake's note-book, and they could not understand this turn of affairs.

Ahrens went out with a light of desperation in his eyes. He **hit** the ball harder than he had any time that day. But when it fell in the outfield, an Irontown boy was under it. The game was over. Fairview had lost.

Carlson jumped up from the bench. "Why couldn't Neale bat?" he demanded.

Over to the bench poured the Fairview students. They had seen Neale start for the plate and they had seen him turn back. What did it all mean? Why had Ahrens been sent out after failing all afternoon? It was throwing the game away.

Buddy's nerves tightened. He believed in Fairview. He believed that the school was sincere in its new life. Here, however, came the supreme test.

The students had supported the nine. They had spent their money and had come all the way to Irontown. During the game they had **worked**

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themselves up to a high nervous tension. Would they, with their blood hungry for a victory that had been denied them, still see the right road—the path of honor?

Buddy had never expected to tell the story of Drake's note-book. He wanted to save Carrots's feelings. Now, however, he realized that he must speak. The students were entitled to an explanation. He faced them.

"Fellows," he said, "you think you've seen some mighty funny baseball. Neale didn't go to bat, because it wouldn't have been fair. This week a fellow brought me a book——"

"I did," said Carrots.

"Carrots brought me a book," Buddy corrected. "I wasn't going to tell his name, but as long as he's willing, all right. The book had been lost by Drake after the first Irontown game. It had Irontown's signals and the weakness of every one of her batters. Carrots wanted to do us a good turn so he brought me the book——"

"He wouldn't take it," Carrots broke in. "He wouldn't even look at it. He said it wouldn't be fair and square."

Buddy flushed. "I guess Neale saw the book, too," he went on hurriedly.

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Neale nodded.

"Only for a few minutes," said Carrots. He seemed anxious to clear everybody's skirts but his own.

"See, fellows?" Buddy went on. "Only for a few minutes. Suddenly, as Neale sat here, he began to read the battery signals. What he had seen in the book all came back to him. When I told him to go to bat he—he said it wouldn't be fair. That's all."

There was a long silence. After a time Poole spoke.

"Fellows," he said, "the score was Irontown, 5; Fairview, 4. Nevertheless, I think Fairview won."

Still the silence lasted. Buddy felt a chill creep to his heart.

And then, without call from cheer leader, without urging of any kind, a spontaneous sound slowly arose from the clustered boys. It was solemn, like the low notes of a mighty organ. It trembled with an emotion of pride that was too deep for words. It was singing:

"Come, lift your voices, let them ring,
To Fairview's praise and glory;
No stain shall darken any page
Of Fairview's splendid story.

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Then here's to her, long may she light
The path of honor and of right,
Fairview, the bravest of the brave——"

Buddy threw an arm across Neale's shoulder. "Come on," he cried happily. "Let's go in and get dressed. Come on, Carrots."

Carrots closed the score-book. "Gee!" he said. "I feel as though Fairview did win."

The players walked off the field. The song followed them, thrilling their hearts, pledging them anew to the fine, clean ways that had come to the school.

One boy, walking in the rear with bent head, found that all his world had changed. His ways were going to be clean ways, too.

That boy was Carrots O'Toole.



